
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

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Revelation 5: 1-7: "The Scroll"

General idea: We see here a portrait of worship as John receives a vision about the Scroll. God is holding the scroll, His covenant of the deed of creation and our redemption, His promise and plan, and His destiny of the world, as an angelic voice shouts with all its might, "who is worthy to open the scroll?" *Who is commendable and able to pay our debt of sin and give us redemption before God the Father? Who is daring enough to go through what it takes to accomplish this? Who is going to break its sacred seals?* But, no one was found that could. No man or beast, no principality or angelic host could come close to being able to open this deed to the redemption of our souls. The scroll's veracity and importance, its weight and significance were no match for any created being to accomplish. No one in all of creation was even able to read its face or contents. Simply put, no one could open it, just as no one was able to pay the price for sin, give us redemption and forgiveness, or enable us to receive such precious gifts.

John weeps, as we all would weep if no one could help us out of our depravity or give us any hope for the future. It seemed for a time that there was no one who could unfold this scroll and give us new life for the future. Then the elders told John, *It is OK. The mighty Lion of Judah and heir to the throne of David is here; He is uniquely worthy and will war against God's enemies. The gentle Lamb is also here who was slain and purchased our souls by His blood from His atoning sacrifice. He is the Lion and the Lamb and He will open the scroll and redeem us.* Yes, no one could read or open the scroll—no one except The One who is Worthy, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Vs. 1-3: This passage reads like an ancient legal document written on "papyrus," the ancient paper made from said plant. Documents, such as wills or contracts, were normally written on one side, rolled, tied with strings, and then sealed with wax and an impression from a signet ring. Such a document could not be opened until the proper time, such as after the death of the person the will was from. As an exception, this Scroll was written on both sides, which was very rare, giving the document more credence but also being ominous (Isa. 6:8; Ezek. 2:9-10).

- *The right hand* refers to God's power, authority, and eminence.
- *Scroll* represents a piece of papyrus or parchment that is usually bound or sewn together and rolled on a wood spindle. In order to read it, it was unrolled. (Codices in the second century—books—replaced this.) If it were an official legal document, as this was, it was tied and sealed with wax. This denotes the power and eminence of His Word. Here, it is depicted as a "Roman will" containing God's covenant of the deed of creation and our

redemption, and His promise and plan (Ex. 32:15; Psalm 2:8; Ezra 2:9-10. Dan. 12:4; Heb. 1:2; Rev. 10:2, 8-10).

- *Writing on both sides.* This is called “opisthography.” Normally, only one side of the papyrus was written on, the side where the fibers of the papyrus paper line up horizontally. The “recto,” as it was called, was the smooth side designed for writing. The outside, the rough side was used for the title information and address and was called the “verso.” Here, the fibers were vertical and rough and were where the ties and seal were placed.
- *Sealed with seven seals* meant it was a sealed, legal document so it could not be tampered with. It was impossible to open such a scroll without it showing that it was tampered or tainted with and thus altered. Each seal was a separate witness; the more seals, the greater its relevance and importance, although it was common in Roman wills to have seven seals. Seven, in Jewish writings, was a number meaning completeness and perfect. This image gives us the impression of absolute holiness (Isaiah 29:11; Dan. 12:4).
- *Mighty angel* infers that a summons goes out of God’s plan, that all may hear (Rev. 18:21).
- *Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll* meant *who has done as Christ has done for us? Who can take His place, His eminence, or His significance?* The application is the question of whether money, power, career, success, or failure can take Christ’s place. The answer is, nothing can! The ultimate power is that Christ saved us; His unsealing of the scroll means He accomplished God’s purpose.
- *No one*, no being in all creation is worthy. The image of Christ opening the scroll means His plan and promise have been accomplished (Ex. 20:4; Phil. 2:10).
- *No one in heaven or on earth could open the scroll or even look inside* is a colloquial phrase expressing the centrality of “no one,” “no where,” or “no place.” This passage does not teach a threefold division of the universe as some speculate.

The theme here is not esoteric or mysterious; rather, it shows us how to come before Christ in reverence and worship. He is Worthy and in charge because of what He has done for you and me. This means we give Him gratitude for His saving sacrifice, and respect Him for His Sovereignty. This means He is the One we love, trust, and feel secure in. He is the One we fear and marvel at. The application is also simple, yet the hardest of all human activity, and that is to put our trust in Him—to give the scroll of our will to Him.

Vs. 4-7: Jesus is the Lamb who is slain for us. He is the sacrifice for our

redemption and He is the Lion, the One in charge of all things seen and unseen. He is Sovereign and Judge (Lion) and our Savior (Lamb) (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:18-20).

- *I wept* refers to a loud wailing as in intense mourning for a loved ones death, a common expression in Middle Eastern cultures. John longs for God's purpose to be completed, but that seems to him to be impossible (Matt. 6:10).
- *Lion of the tribe of Judah* means God is the Judge. He is in charge as the mighty conqueror of sin. He has the right and ability to rule and to judge. This is also a messianic title referring to the promise to the tribe of Judah to rule (Judah means a "lion's cub") and the Davidic Kingship. The image of a lion was considered the ultimate depiction of power; it was commonly used to refer to kings and leaders, and denotes authority, strength, and courage. This was used on Torah Shrines and old Jewish art (Gen. 49:8-10; Isaiah 11:1, 10; 35:9; 65:25; Ezek. 21:27; Rev. 17:14; 19:11-21).
- *Root of David* means David's kingly line and right to rule, and that the Messiah would come from His lineage, even though Christ was preexistent to David (Isaiah 11:1-10; Dan. 7:16; Zech. 4:11; Matt. 9:27; 12:23; 22:41-45; John 1:1; 7:42; Rom. 15:12).
- *Triumphed*. Christ fulfilled God's plan and promise that *it has been accomplished, His will has been done, His purpose for history and the future will be done* (Matt. 6:10; John 19:30)!
- *He is able...worthy* refers to His work on the cross for our reconciliation and redemption, His life for ours.
- *Lamb... been slain* means that Christ is the sacrifice. A lamb is the common animal that was "slain" and sacrificed for the atonement of sin and used for commerce. Jesus replaces this lamb as the ultimate sacrifice. This refers to sacrifice, and our Lord who offers us salvation. In contrast to the image of a lion, the lamb was considered the weakest of all animals, needing constant attention and care just to survive. A lamb would die in the wild, where the lion thrives. The image of the lamb was common in apocalyptic literature, depicting victory and power through, and sometimes over death. (Ex. 12:12-13; Isaiah 53:7; John 1:29; 21:15; Rev. 17:14).
- *As though/as if it had been slain*. As this act is now past tense, Christ accomplished this by how He lived and how He died for us. His sacrificial death and resurrection was necessary for God's redemptive plan and coming judgment to take place. Christ is now alive forevermore (Rev. 1:18)!
- *Seven horns* were a symbol of power, authority, and strength, and called people to attention. In contrast, in Daniel 7:7, 20; 8:3, 5, the fourth beast had

ten horns; numbers are not for counting, but metaphors as *seven* symbolizes full strength and completeness, and denotes Christ's eternal life and His spirit-filled and empowered life (Duet. 33:17; Psalm 89:17; 92:10; Dan 7:8; 8:3; John 3:34; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:45).

- *Seven eyes* give us an image of royal Persian emissaries, representing their king as his eyes, and thus referring to the eyes, knowledge, and awareness of God. Others say this refers to powerful beings subservient to Christ or perhaps refers to the angels in the previous passage and/or the seven archangels from Judaism. (Zech. 3:9; 4:10; 6:5-7; Rev. 8:2).
- *Seven spirits of God* refers to His fullness and perfection, taking it from the previous word phrase. This is also a name for the Holy Spirit, referring to His Fullness, not a split personality. This is debated as some good commentators say it does not refer to the Holy Spirit, rather believing it refers to the seven celestial beings (Rev. 8:2). In Zechariah, this represents the abundant light shining from the lamps, referring to God's fullness and Spirit. Either way, this passage does seem to testify to the depth and reality of the Trinity (Isa. 11:2; Zech. 4:2-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; Rev. 1:4; 4:5; 5:14).
- *He came and took the scroll* infers that the addressee of the scroll took and received it; Christ took it, because it was for Him (Rev. 3:5; 20:12).

Satan seeks to be the one to open the scroll; he wants it so he can use it for his gain to manipulate our souls to bow to him. In so doing, Satan offers to Christ the world—as if it were his to begin with. All Jesus had to do was worship Satan just once (Matt. 4:8-10). This passage has more to do with our attitude and reverence of Christ who holds the deeds to our soul and to creation. No one can manipulate us from His grasp. Jesus has won the fight, and He is Worthy not only to open this scroll, but also to open our hearts and hold all the possessions of creation in His grasp. He did this on the cross. When you accepted His grace, did you place the deed of your scroll (soul) into His hands?

Preterist view sees this passage as a courtroom and the scroll as the sentence of judgment, as the scroll represents God's judgments against apostate Jerusalem for shedding the blood of the righteous (such as James) and its conquest and destruction by the Romans (Matt. 23:35). The One who is Worthy is the one who should execute this sentence—and that is Christ. John is grieved because it seemed, until the end of the trial, that no one was able to judge and carry out the sentence and that the martyrs would go un-avenged. This view misses the main point of His redemption and only focuses on the judgment aspect as being already completed, which it is not. Jerusalem's judgments have been partially carried out, but not the ones for the rest of creation that this passage attests to and is further explained in chapter six. The Lion and the Lamb refer to Christ, who is the victim of Jerusalem's injustice, but who is now the hero who prevails and rescues us even when we had already given up and avenges

the righteous (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14).

Futurist view sees the scroll as the title deed of earth and God's will as His plan is to be opened and God's long, overdue judgments are to be carried out. This passage is about God reclaiming and redeeming His world from Satan's grasp and the coming tribulation (1 Pet. 1:18-19). The "elder" they see as Judah himself is speaking to John (Gen. 49:9). The *seven spirits* are seen as the fullness of God or seven angels. The horn is seen as a symbol from Jericho's walls coming down. More of this is shown in chapter eight.

Idealist view sees this passage as the redemptive plan of God, and God's last will and testament. Since it is written on both sides, this indicates that nothing can be added to His plan.

Historicist view sees this passage as God's providence, and depicting the purpose, method, and design of God for creation and redemption and His governing of the universe and the Church. This view also concludes that no one other than Jesus is capable, able, or willing to fulfill the providence of God. John's weeping is seen as his disappointment that it seems redemption cannot take place, as he had hoped, unless the One who is worthy can open the scroll. The Lion and the Lamb refer to Christ's dual nature as Judge and Redeemer.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. In what manner do you like to worship our Lord? How does this passage give you a picture of worship? Have you placed the deed to your scroll (soul) into His hands? If not, what is in the way?
2. How would you describe the scroll? Who is worthy to open the scroll and why? Why did John weep? Why do you think the scroll was written on both sides?

3. Why could no man or beast, principality or angelic host dare come close to open this deed to the redemption of our souls?
4. Why does Christ have the right and ability to rule and to judge us? How can these aspects of His character help enable you to further put your trust in Him, to give the scroll of your will over to Him?
5. How would you describe and contrast the mighty Lion and the gentle Lamb? How is Jesus uniquely worthy to open this scroll and accomplish God's purpose?
6. What does it mean for your faith and life that Christ's purpose for history and the future has been and will be done, that He has accomplished God's purpose?
7. How do you respect Christ in your daily life? How can a better expression of your gratitude for His saving sacrifice and respect for His Sovereignty help you grow more in faith and maturity? What is in the way of this?
8. Why was the resurrection necessary for God's redemptive plan and coming judgment to take place?
9. What tends to take Christ's place in the lives of some Christians? Is it money, power, career, success, failures, or what? Since nothing can take His place, how and why does this happen?
10. Who has done for you what Christ has done? Who or what can take His place, His eminence, and His significance in your life? Now, carefully go over your life, attitude, goals, and mindset and ask yourself, *is Christ really number one in all aspects of my life?* If not, why not?
11. What do God's power, authority, eminence, and absolute holiness mean to you? How can these characters of God help focus your church to be more centered upon Christ and less centered upon trends and traditions?
12. What needs to take place for your and your church's fear and marvel of Christ to become more powerful and meaningful?