

Book of Revelation, Chapter 5 Notes and Discussion Questions

Chapters 5 continues "Reel 1" where the action takes place in heaven. In Chapter 5 the action picks up, Chapter 4 having set the scene itself.

5:1 -- The book or scroll containing the "things that must be hereafter" (Chap. 4:1) is introduced. Normally a papyrus scroll had writing only on one side, the side on which the fibers ran vertically. It was difficult to write on the other side of the scroll since the fibers ran horizontally. That the writing was on both sides suggests completeness. The modern fashion of bookbinding is a Christian development of the second century designed to make it easier to find a particular verse of Scripture more quickly.

The importance of this scroll which has its origin in God's omniscience (omni = all; science = knowledge) is obvious from the fact that it had 7 seals (perfection) and not just anyone could open it (verses 2-3). Each seal represents one step in the final completion of man's history.

5:2 -- The drama of the scene builds as a search is begun for one who is worthy to open the scroll. Normally scrolls that were sealed by the writer with a wax seal were only to be opened by the intended reader. Since the scroll contains "things that must be hereafter," the one who opens it must be one who has authority over history. Because it is sealed with seven seals, presumably by God Himself, the opener must be perfect. The language of verse 4 reinforces this idea.

5:3 -- ". . . no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth . . ." was a common phrase of John's time which meant to convey "no one" in a universal sense. ". . . who could open the scroll" -- literally this means (in the Greek), "no one who had the authority or the right" to open the scroll.

5:4 -- St. John is deeply concerned about what will happen to men on earth and is moved to tears when he sees that none can open the book. His concern for people should also be ours.

5:5 -- John is comforted by one of the Elders or Sainted ministers of the Word who understands what is going on. The One who is able to open the book shall, and that One is none other than Christ Himself. All of the world's history finds Him at the center working His purposes in the midst of man's rebellion. His titles here are an important link to this fact as they represent His own historical importance as well as His identity.

"Lion from the tribe of Judah" -- Jacob's prophecy in blessing in Genesis 49:8-10 also points to this event which John beheld. That it speaks of Christ is evident in Hebrews 7:14. The Lion is a strong conqueror and ruler -- Christ took on the devil in the supreme battle of history, and won. He hands that victory and its benefits to us. Obviously here it is that Christianity stands on factual historical events, unlike manmade religions.

"The Root of David" -- He is of royal descent. Isaiah 11:1-2 uses the same language to describe Christ. Again, note the importance of the historical facts here. These are all references to what Christ did and what He is like. At the heart of this is the fact that He is Savior. This makes Him worthy to open the seals for He is rightly praised as the Lord of history.

5:6 -- The Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world -- Christ Himself. He is the Lamb who was slain as an offering to God for the sins of the world. The Old Testament offerings did not take away

sins, but graphically showed how God would take away sins, not counting them against the Old Testament believers who trusted in the coming Lamb of God to take away their sins. See Leviticus 4:1-7 for the typical sin offering.

"Lamb, standing, as if slain" -- John knew what Jesus looked like. But remember, here in John's vision of heaven, people and things appear according to their spiritual realities (Isaiah 53:7 and John 1:29, 36). The scars of Christ's servanthood remain forever as the sign of the great price He paid for us. To the Christian this is not gruesome, but a comfort, and it gives us the reason to sacrifice even our lives and all that we are and have to Him. He went to this extreme, which was the only way, "that I may be His own and live under Him in His Kingdom." How He must love us! Terrors shall follow, in history, in life, in our own time, but we are comforted when we know that all is under the direction of the One who loved us as much as this. It is easy to follow Him when He leads you into a bright room of joy and love, but He must also, out of this same love, lead you in dank, forlorn places full of the darkest dangers, even through the valley of the shadow of death. We are given the courage to follow in trust in the faith that it is this same One who loves us so dearly, who leads us, guides the events for our good, and stands next to us. The realization of all of this is the main purpose of Chapter 5, as a preparation for the terrible things to follow.

"Seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits (or seven-fold Spirit) of God" -- Horns are the universal symbol of power and strength. Christ is Almighty. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and the perfect seven gifts perfectly. This symbolic expression is explained in Isaiah 11:1-2.

5:7 What is in the Scroll can only deal with the final results of His victory, the complete overthrow of His enemies and the triumphant course of His Church (the elect) through history.

There are at least seven other references to this Scroll in Scripture including: Ezekiel 2:9-10, Isaiah 29:11-12, and Daniel 8:26, 12:1-4, who were also shown the scroll. These references give us a more complete understanding of the scroll and the events which are about to take place as it is opened. These additional references make clear that the scroll does indeed deal with the final events in this world's history.

5:8 -- When the Lamb - the Lion of Judah, the Savior - takes the scroll, connected with God's omniscience especially here with regard to history, the four living creatures (the agents of divine providence), the 24 Elders (the agents of the ministry of the Word throughout all history, humans) bow down in worship of the Lamb. He is true God with the Father and the Holy Ghost! History and the ministry of the Word go together to glorify God, even our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Harp to provide beautiful rich music for a New Song! Those churches which forbid musical instruments should take note of this. It has been said that the best earthly music strives to reproduce the heavenly music.

"Golden bowls full of incense" -- This phrase is explained in the next phrase: "which are the prayers of the saints." Remember, in this vision things in heaven appear as objects that reflect their spiritual reality. It is comforting to know that the worship and prayers of believers rise directly, as incense, to God. This is an improvement on Jewish teaching of the time which said that the angels carry our prayers to God. In Hebrew worship flat, shallow cups referred to as bowls were commonly used to burn incense during worship.

Who are "saints"? Any and all who believe that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior -- hopefully you! See Colossians 1:2 and James 5:16. These are their prayers -- your prayers -- our prayers especially for

the church, in thanksgiving to God, and for the Lord's Work. We see that these prayers are of great concern in heaven and do come into our God's presence. A Christian on earth can come as close to God in prayer as does the greatest saint in heaven!

5:9 -- "A new song" -- the old song was of the Redeemer to come -- in Old Testament times. This new song is of the Redeemer who has come and is now Lord over all. Here we have perhaps the best clue for pinpointing this heavenly-out of time event in earth history: right after the ascension of our Lord into heaven when He assumed the position of power at "the right hand of God" as we say in the Creed.

The reason for Christ's worthiness to take the Book and break its seals is here given: ". . . because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God . . ." The focus here is redemption. Christ purchased us with His blood from the ownership of the devil.

Are those who do not have forgiveness by grace through faith actually owned by the devil? See: Matthew 10:24-25; Matthew 6:24; John 8:42-44; and Matthew 7:21-23. And on judgment day the devil shall claim all of us, but God will not allow him to take those who are washed clean from sin and who have been thankful on earth to have been purchased for God by Him.

5:10 -- All Christians are priests of God in that, cleansed by the blood of Christ, they can come before God without fear in prayer. They need no special order of priests to pray for them as in the Old Testament church and the Roman Catholic church.

" . . . to serve our God" -- Yes, the angels sing this, too, for they too are His creatures and they joy to worship Him with believers.

" . . . they will reign on the earth." -- A millennium? No. We'll discuss this in Revelation 20. No "thousand years" is mentioned here. Scripture says that the earth shall be under the cross of Christ until the end of time: John 16:33 and Acts 14:22. The earth is the Lord's and is even now the inheritance of His children as well as heaven: Eph. 1:13-14 & 17-23; Colossians 3:23-24. But this earth does not belong to unbelievers.

5:11 -- Now millions upon millions of angels join in, literally "ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands."

5:12 -- The angels also worship Christ's work of redemption, for while we know and believe the Gospel, and the angels are already in perfection. Yet angels desire to know what it is God has given us! I Peter 1:12.

5:13 -- And every created thing in the universe then also joins in this praise of Christ -- except the unbelievers and the devils, of course. Here we have an excellent example of John 5:23 -- "All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." Here we can really see how and why any religion or person that does not honor Christ as God and Savior has no standing before God at all. Christ Himself is the very center of all.

Such great music, singing and praise John must have heard! How beautiful it must have sounded! It remained to Georg Frederic Handel to set these choruses to earthly music as the final and overwhelming climax of his Messiah. It is then no wonder, if Handel's music is but a dim image of the glory of the heavenly choruses, that at the end of this hymn (v. 14) the Elders fell down, overcome with the desire to worship Him anew.

Study and Discussion Questions for Revelation -- Chapter 5

1. In what ways has your study of Revelation 5 helped you to appreciate our worship and praise of the Lord on earth?
2. How has this chapter helped you to appreciate and understand some of the Old Testament imagery of the Redeemer (for example 5:5)?
3. Has anything in this chapter encouraged you to make a better verbal witness of your faith to a relative or friend who does not believe in Jesus Christ as his or her own personal Savior from sin, death and the devil? What?
4. Do we tend to "get used to" hearing about Christ's work of salvation for us? Yet the heavenly hosts can praise Him endlessly for eternity and not tire of it -- and they didn't even need saving! What is the remedy for our getting so used to hearing about Christ's work of salvation for us that it does not move us?
5. We often remember (or maybe not often enough!) what verse 9 says: that we have been purchased and won for God by Christ's blood which won for us the forgiveness of sins. But notice that verse 10 explains that there is more in the package -- Christ is praised for doing this for a purpose. What is that purpose?
6. What does it mean that you are member of a nation of a kingdom of priests to serve our God?