

Revelation 5:1-6a

Who is worthy to open the scroll?

(The People's Bible, Revelation, pages 68-71)

Look

Chapter 4 focuses on God the Father. We praise him because he is holy and has created all things. He determines what will happen in the world. This is part of the foundation of the revelation. Chapter 5 lays more of the foundation of Revelation. This chapter revolves around a dilemma.

Verse 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).

Verse 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.

Verse 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.

Verse 6 **“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. The realization of all of this is the main purpose of Chapter 5, as a preparation for the terrible things to follow. 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.

Discuss

1. What was the purpose of a scroll in the ancient world?
2. Ezekiel was given a similar scroll. See Ezekiel 2:9–3:1; Daniel 8:26, 12:1–4. What similarities do you see between the scrolls?
3. What challenge did the angel pose to all creation? What dilemma did this challenge create?
4. Why did John cry when he saw that no one could open the scroll?
5. Jesus stepped forward. He is the solution to the dilemma. Note the symbolism with
 - the lion (Genesis 49:9,10)
 - the shoot from the stump (Isaiah 11:1,10)
 - the Lamb (John 1:29)

Apply

6. Evaluate this statement: In one respect, it was good that no one was found to open the scroll.
7. What impact do these verses have on how you view the future?

No one could break the seals and open the scroll until the Lamb of God stepped forward.

Revelation 5:6b-14

The Lamb is worthy to open the scroll

(The People's Bible, Revelation, pages 71-74)

Look

Verse 6 **“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 was filled with the Holy Spirit and the perfect seven gifts perfectly. This symbolic expression is explained in Isaiah 11:1-2.

Verse 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.

“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.

Who are **“saints”**? Any and all who believe that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior. 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!

Verse 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.

Verse 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.

Verse 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.

Discuss

1. How can Jesus be both a lion and a Lamb at the same time?
2. When Jesus took the scroll, the living creatures and the elders fell down and worshiped him. How do their words of praise fit with everything we have seen in the first part of the chapter?
3. What did the angels say as they praised the Lord? What did all creation say?

Apply

4. One commentator pointed out that some creatures in Revelation have eyes and some have horns. But only Jesus has both horns and eyes. Why is this comforting?
5. What is the significance of the seven horns and seven eyes? Why is this symbol comforting for us?

Chapters 4 and 5 set the foundation for Revelation. Chapter 4 gives us a vision of God's throne, the center of power and activity in the universe. Chapter 5 gives us a vision of Jesus, the Lamb who was slain and the lion who rules over God's kingdom forever. Jesus lets us know that we are part of his kingdom and are ruling with him, no matter what the future may hold.