

5. Who is Worthy to Break the Seals?

Revelation 5:1-14

I had the privilege of living in Israel for more than a year and a half, and I have led many tours to this beautiful and unique land. Having fought five major wars in its existence, the people of Israel are in a constant state of readiness for any conflict that may threaten their existence as a nation. That is why when planning to house the precious, ancient Dead Sea Scrolls, they built a place where the scrolls could survive any kind of explosion, and they are safely protected deep underground at the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem. The Dead Sea Scrolls consist of passages of the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, considered to be more than 2,000 years old. They comprise the earliest copies of Biblical text ever found. There is one scroll that is even more precious than those in Jerusalem, the scroll that is in the hand of the Almighty God sitting on the throne in heaven.

As we come to chapter five of the Book of Revelation, we must remember that the chapter divisions came more than four hundred years after the New Testament was written, and were not something divinely inspired.¹ Chapter five, therefore, should be read as a continuation from chapter four of John's vision of seeing what takes place in the throne room of heaven. As chapter five begins, all watching the scene before them are unsettled at what took place next: □

The Lamb Takes the Scroll

¹Then I saw a scroll in the right hand of the One seated on the throne. It had writing on both sides and was sealed with seven seals. ²And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” (Revelation 5:1-2).

What do you think makes this scroll so significant? Why is someone worthy needed to break the seals and open the scroll?

The big questions before us are what is the importance of this particular scroll, and why is it sealed with seven seals? In ancient days, scrolls were made of papyrus or parchment and had columns of writing on them. The length of the message determined the size of the scroll. For instance, the complete scroll of the prophet Isaiah kept at the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem is twenty-four feet long, with fifty-four columns of text.² When the scroll was finished, it was rolled up, and if it was a legal document, it required witnesses who would apply hot wax to the rolled-up scroll and put their seal into the wax. The outside of the sealed scroll contained a brief summation of that written inside. John Walvoord wrote, "Roman law required a will to be sealed seven times as illustrated in the wills left by Augustus and Vespasian for their successors."³

Some scholars believe the scroll represents God's will and final settlement of the affairs of all the earth, while others believe that the scroll represents the title deed to the physical creation. John's

¹ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/stewart_don/faq/bible-special/question8-why-is-the-bible-divided-into-chapters-and-verses.cfm

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaiah_Scroll

³ <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/revelation-5/>

eyes are drawn to focus on the importance of this scroll as it is seen in the right hand of God. Voiced by a mighty angel, the challenge to the universe rings out for all to hear is: **“Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?”** (v. 2). The picture is of an authoritative call loudly proclaimed through the universe to find someone worthy who could break the satanic hold on the planet. This satanic bondage came about when Adam gave up his dominion when he obeyed the voice of the evil one in the Garden of Eden, where Satan was symbolized as the serpent (Genesis 3:6).

³But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or look inside it. ⁴And I began to weep bitterly, because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or look inside it (Revelation 5:3-4).

As the loud voice of the angel reverberates through the universe, at first, there is no reply. No one is found worthy, which causes John to weep bitterly. Before we go on, we must understand the reason for John's intense sobbing. Let's consider the circumstances in John's life up to this point. John is a man who left his profession as a fisherman and threw his entire life into walking with the Messiah. He had desired to be at Christ's right hand in the kingdom of God (Mark 10:35-37). His brother, James, also an Apostle of the Lord Jesus, was the first martyr killed with the sword at the hand of Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:1-2).

John had sacrificed everything, including being present for his family, to be available for the mission of Christ. Like a true soldier of Christ, John faithfully carried on his life's purpose and became a leader of the churches in Asia Minor, the same churches that, at the age of ninety-two, he wrote warnings in the second and third chapters of Revelation. Think of how he must have felt when he heard the Lord's word to the church of Laodicea, the church which caused the Lord to declare his judgment against them, stating that they had become lukewarm. All this occurred after John was burned in oil and yet did not die, and now he was suffering banishment on the isle of Patmos.

How encouraged he must have felt when he was told in chapter 4:1, **“Come up here, and I will show you things which must be hereafter.”** Perhaps, his longings for his ministry would finally be realized in what he would see! Instead, he heard no one respond to the call for someone worthy to open the scroll. For most of his life, he had been waiting for the fulfillment of all the promises of God, and now he sobs greatly to find no one worthy to break the power of Satan, sin, and death reigning over the planet. However, John was too hasty to weep, for one of the elders commands him not to weep and to look again as someone appears to open the scroll, someone from the royal line of David, the lion of the tribe of Judah:

⁵Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! Behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed to open the scroll and its seven seals" (Revelation 5:5).□

The Lion of the Tribe of Judah

Throughout human history, people have longed to see good triumph over evil and righteousness to prevail over injustice. Humankind has struggled with all types of suffering caused by slavery

to sin. Darkness prevailed due to evil forces, but there is One who has triumphed, not only for Himself but as the first fruit for all of humanity and creation itself (1 Corinthians 15:20). He broke the invisible chains on the human heart for everyone who will come to Him and receive new life. Jesus the Messiah has triumphed to open the scroll!

Any Jew with understanding of Jewish history knew of the prophecy of the One like a lion from Judah. On his death bed, Jacob, or Israel, to which his name was changed, prophesied over the future of each of his twelve sons that became the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob prophesied accurately about the tribe of Judah:

⁸“Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons will bow down to you. ⁹**You are a lion’s cub, Judah;** you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? ¹⁰**The scepter will not depart from Judah,** nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, **until he to whom it belongs shall come** and the obedience of the nations shall be his (Genesis 49:8-10).

Jacob prophesied that from the tribe of Judah would come the leadership of the nation. The scepter (v. 10) was a rod or staff that symbolized power or authority, a scepter such as that held out to Queen Esther to approach the King of Persia (Esther 5:2). The lion is the king of beasts, whereas, a lion’s cub or young lion is exceptionally brave, knowing no fear in its strength and vigor. Jacob further spoke that the tribe would be like a lioness, said to be even fiercer than the male lion. Under the inspiration of the Spirit, Jacob went on to say that One would come from the line of Judah, who would take the throne of not only Israel but also the nations of the world (v. 10). Later, after David, the greatest king of Israel passed away, the prophet Isaiah went on to prophesy further that the greater King from the line of David would appear on the scene and lead the nation:

¹Then a shoot will spring up from **the stump of Jesse, and a Branch from his roots** will bear fruit. ²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and strength, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the LORD. ³And He will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what His eyes see, and He will not decide by what His ears hear, ⁴but with righteousness He will judge the poor, and with equity He will decide for the lowly of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth and slay the wicked with the breath of His lips. ⁵Righteousness will be the belt around His hips, and faithfulness the sash around His waist (Isaiah 11:1-5).

This Messiah King would come from the stump of Jesse, the father of King David, called the Root of David (Revelation 5:5), a descendant of the royal line of King David. The scepter of kingly leadership would not depart from the line of David until the One to whom the kingdoms of the world (Revelation 11:15) rightly belong shall come (Genesis 49:10). Christ’s birth in Bethlehem of Judah, the hometown of Jesse and David, was in fulfillment of all these prophecies.

So, amid his tears, John looked again for a lion in the throne room; instead, he sees a Lamb:

⁶Then I saw a Lamb who appeared to have been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which represent the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷And He came and took the scroll from the right hand of the One seated on the throne. ⁸When He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹And they sang a new song:

“Worthy are You to take the scroll and open its seals,
because You were slain,
and by Your blood You purchased for God
those from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.
¹⁰You have made them to be a kingdom
and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign upon the earth” (Revelation 5:6-10).

Why is Christ Seen as a Lion, yet also a Lamb? How will both sides of His character be seen throughout history?

Yes, John sees one from the tribe of Judah (5:5) and the kingly line of David, but His victory over Satan came about by His being a sacrificial Lamb. The Greek language speaks of a little lamb, a young Lamb that takes a Jewish person back to the time of Passover when they sacrificed a little lamb in the prime of life (Exodus 12:5) to deliver them from Pharaoh's slavery in Egypt. How can a lamb take on the beast of the Book of Revelation? (Revelation 13:1). He overcame Satan by purchasing salvation by giving His blood as the purchase price. “For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength” (1 Corinthians 1:25).

Man is seen as sold into slavery because of giving up his dominion over the earth to the serpent (Satan) in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-6). When Adam and Eve obeyed the enemy rather than God, they were cut off from the source of life and the tree of life, and they came under servitude to Satan, a very real and evil spiritual being. The penalty for sin that was passed down to every human being is death (Romans 6:23), and the only way out of slavery to Satan was for a fully perfect man to pay the penalty for him. A man cannot pay the price for another man (Psalm 49:7), but God, the creator of all things, by His redeeming value as a substitutionary sacrifice, can pay the penalty for man. Jesus, the God-Man, purchased all who will receive His free gift of salvation and come under His covenant of love. “You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

In the passage above, Paul the Apostle writes to the Corinthian church about how they were bought at the cross with the Savior's blood. What do you think that glorifying God with your body means for each of us?

This Lamb bore the scars of wounds received by being a lamb sacrificed, yet He was still alive (v. 6), bearing the wounds in His hands and feet by being a substitutionary sacrifice. The longing of Israel, and all believers everywhere, will come when Messiah comes in power and roar from

Zion as a lion, but that is still yet to happen at a later time in John's perspective as he now watches the Lord Jesus take the scroll:

The LORD **will roar** from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel (Joel 3:16).

For now, John sees a Lamb having seven horns, the number of completeness, symbolizing the One with all power. Along with the seven horns were seven eyes, i.e., the full seven-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit's ability to see and know all things (Isaiah 11:1-2), "**for God gives the Spirit without limit**" (John 3:34). John considers this Lamb as standing in the center of the throne of God (v. 6) and taking the scroll from His Father seated on the throne. All heaven broke out in worship as Christ took the scroll. The elders bowed down before the Lamb, and bowls of incense symbolizing the prayers of many all over the earth were seen. This scene was the culminating time that the Apostle John had awaited. I'm sure he now wept again for the joy of the moment. Many of us, I believe, will also see this scene in heaven, if we should leave this earth before the coming of the Lord, roaring like a lion in great power and glory.

The Lamb Exalted

¹¹"Then I looked, and I heard the voices of many angels and living creatures and elders encircling the throne, and their number was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands. ¹²In a loud voice they said:

‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and riches
and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and blessing!’

¹³"And I heard every creature in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

‘To Him who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb,
be praise and honor and glory and power
forever and ever!’

¹⁴"And the four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped" (Revelation 5:11-14).

At the sight of the Lord taking the scroll into His hands, John is likely overcome with emotion, just as each of us will if we are in heaven at the time. Remember, all that he is viewing is what must be hereafter (Revelation 4:1). The time will come when Jesus will come, and how ecstatic will be those whose lives have been bought by Him. We see many angels proclaiming and singing. We see the living creatures around the throne, the twenty-four elders, as well as many angels, myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, loudly giving praise to God. On top of

that, John then hears every creature that has been longing for deliverance, in heaven, in the sea, and yes, even under the earth—all crying out to the Lord in worship, praise, and adoration. What a great day that will be! Hallelujah!

While we wait for our King to come, what should we be doing in the meantime? How shall we now pray? Does this alter your perspective of God's judgment as a positive concept? □

Prayer. Lord, we see the nations in chaos, and our world struggling with gross injustice, cruelty, and pain. What a glorious day it will be when You arise in power to triumph over the enemy of our souls and bring salvation, i.e., wholeness to your creation once again. Make us ready, our hearts soft and open to you, our eyes looking to You in faith, while we proclaim, "Come Lord Jesus!" □

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