

A STUDY OF REVELATION CHAPTER 5

- 1. And upon the [open] right [hand] of the One continuously sitting upon the throne, I saw a scroll having been written within and behind (i.e., written on both sides), having been sealed by seven seals.**
- 2. And I saw a strong agent (messenger) repeatedly proclaiming (announcing openly and publicly) in a great voice,
"Who is worthy (of equal value) to open the scroll, and to loose (destroy) its seals?"**
- 3. And no one (not one) within the heaven, neither upon the land (earth) nor down under the land (earth), had power (was able) to open the scroll not to see (observe) it.**
- 4. And I was greatly weeping, that no one was found (is found) worthy (of equal value) to open the scroll nor even to see (observe) it.**
- 5. And one forth from among the elders is saying to me,
"Do not be weeping! Consider! The Lion out of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, overcame (or: conquers) to open the scroll and to loose (destroy) its seals."**
- 6. And within the midst of the throne and of the four living ones, and within the midst of the elders, I saw a little Lamb standing, as one having been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes -- which are the Seven Spirits of God: the Ones having been and still being sent forth as apostles into all the Land (or: earth) --**
- 7. and it came (went), and it has taken (received) so that it has the scroll from out of the right [hand] of the One continuously sitting upon the throne.**
- 8. And when it took (received) the scroll, the four living ones and the twenty-four elders fell before the little Lamb -- each one constantly holding lyres (harps) and golden, shallow bowls being continuously brimming full of incenses (things passed off in fumes), which are the prayers of the set-apart (holy) ones (or: the saints).**
- 9. And they repeatedly sing a new song (ode; hymn), constantly saying,
"You are worthy (of equal value) to take (receive) the scroll and to open its seals, because You were (or: are) slaughtered and bought us by God (for God; in God), within Your blood, from out of the midst of every tribe and tongue (language) and people and multitude (nation).**
- 10. And You made (or: make; form; construct) them kings [other MSS: a kingdom] and priests in (for; to; by) our God, and they continue reigning [reading with Westcott & Hort (following A); other MSS: they will reign] upon the Land (or: the earth)."**
- 11. And I saw and also heard a sound (a voice) of many agents forming a circle around the throne, the living ones, and the elders. And the number of them [is/was] innumerable groups of innumerable groups (myriads of myriads), even thousands of thousands,**
- 12. repeatedly saying with a great voice,
"The little Lamb, the One having been slaughtered, is worthy (of value) to take**

(receive) the power (ability), even wealth (riches) and wisdom and strength and honor and glory (reputation) and blessing."

13. And all creation (every creature) which exists within the heaven, and upon the earth, and down under the earth, also which is upon the sea -- even All Things (the whole) within them -- I heard repeatedly saying,
"The blessing and the honor and the glory (good reputation) and the strength (might) [is] in (by; for; to) the One continuously sitting upon the throne, and in (by; to; for) the little Lamb, into the ages of the ages."

14. And the four living ones say (said), "It is so (Amen)!" And the elders fall (fell) and worship (or: worshiped; kiss the hand toward).

As John continues to describe the scene, the first thing he notes is a scroll which is "upon" the hand of the Enthroned One. This term would suggest that the hand was perhaps extended, but specifically that it was open, palm up. Were it closed around the scroll, it would have been "in" His hand. The significance of this is that the scroll is being offered, presented to whomever is found worthy to open its seals. In vs. 7 the Little Lamb then takes the scroll which has been presented.

A similar situation is seen in Ezk. 2:9-10. Here, however, the scroll is not sealed, but is spread before Ezekiel. It, also, is written on both sides, and contains dirges, a soliloquy, and woe. He is commanded to eat this scroll (a figure for taking its words into himself and "digesting" its contents) and then to go and speak these words to the house of Israel.

A scroll is also used in Zech. 5 as a symbol of a curse which is going forth over the face of all the land (or, earth). However, in Ps. 40:7 it says, "Then I said, Behold, I have come! In the roll of the scroll it is written concerning Me." Thus, unless specified here, let us not presume that this scroll in Rev. signifies woe or a curse. I think that the scroll is a figure of a message from God; a revelation. Let us remember here that we are reading A Revelation of Jesus Christ.

That it is written on both sides (not the normal procedure) tells us that it was a lengthy production: it contains a lot of information, or speaks of a subject of vast and detailed process. In Ex. 32:15 we see that the tablets of the Testimony were inscribed on both sides, front and back. Vs. 16 tells us that these tablets were the work of God.

But this is classified information and there is only One in the entire universe Who is worthy to open its secrets to us. Seven seals is an idea. "The one ordinary document sealed with seven seals was a will. Under Roman law the seven witnesses to a will sealed it with their seals, and it could only be opened when all seven, or their legal representatives, were present." (William Barclay) Another thought is that this means that it was completely sealed; "indicating absolute inviolability" (NIV Study Bible). Perhaps Isaiah gives the best answer, "And to you are all visions becoming as the words of a sealed scroll, which they are giving him acquainted with the scroll, saying, 'Read this, pray.' And he says, 'I cannot, for it is sealed.' " (ch 29:11 CVOT) Or, Dan. 12:4, "Now you Daniel, stop up the words and seal the scroll till the era of the end, when many will swerve as evil will increase." (CVOT)

In Rev. 6 we begin to see what happens when the seals are opened, but not specifically what is written in the scroll. Some have suggested that this scroll contains the remainder of the revelations of this book. Others have suggested that it contains the plan and purposes of the ages which the Little Lamb opens to us. What do you think this scroll meant to the church of the first century? What does it now mean to us? Does it contain prophecies of the

future? Is it the timeless Word of God? Does it contain the Good News of the Kingdom, the Gospel? Barclay states that the scroll is seen by some as a figure for a message of God to man. The problem that no one was worthy to open the seals is solved by the emergence of the Lamb. "But behind this problem lies a great and a challenging truth. God cannot deliver a message to men unless there be a man fit to receive it." (Barclay) Perhaps the scroll represents what God wants to reveal and speak to each of us, individually, but the Lamb Who conquered must open the seals for us, and the resulting processes must follow within us. I suspect that this is the case, both individually and corporately.

Judson Cornwall, in his book, *Elements of Worship*, says, "There was an automatic redemption and there was an intermediary redemption. Their property would be returned to them automatically in the year of Jubilee, or, a kinsman-redeemer could buy back their lost estates at any time The terms of redemption were established at the time the property was sold. When an inheritance was sold, encumbered, or transferred away, there were two scrolls, or instruments of writing, made of the transaction. One was open; the other was sealed. The unsealed one stated the right of possession to the purchaser; basically it was the public record of the transaction. The second scroll, however, contained both the details of the sale and the terms of redemption. This scroll had the signatures of witnesses written on the back side, and then it was rolled up and sealed.... the seals could only be opened when redemption was paid." (cf Jer. 32:6-15)

The focus has been upon the scroll, now in vs. 2 we have a strong messenger who is publicly proclaiming in a great voice. Apparently it is God's desire to have the scroll opened. This is not something done in secret. There is an open quest for one who is worthy, and the search covers first heaven, then earth, then down under the earth. The messenger's voice would seem to have reached the entire universe, but none had the power to open the scroll or even observe it (perhaps meaning, "look into it").

The three realms mentioned in vs. 3 are also spoken of in Ex. 20:4, "Thou shalt not make to thee an image, or any form, that is in the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth." (Roth.) Also in Phil. 2:10, "That in the name of Jesus every knee may bow -- of heavenlies and earthlies, and what are under the earth." (Young) In the Ex. reference it is likely that the third level referred to the creatures in the sea or in lakes, etc. But here in Rev. 5:3&13, and in Phil. 2, above, the reference to a level, or realm, down under the earth seems to be a separate category.

One obvious reference is to the grave. In Gen. 50:5, Joseph quotes Jacob as saying, "... in my grave which I digged for myself, in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me." The old prophet, in I Ki. 13:30, "... laid his [the man of God's] dead body in his own grave." Jonah speaks figuratively of his situation in the bowels of the great fish as "the belly of the unseen (sheol; hades)." Then in 2:6 he says, "... the earth, its bars are about me for the age, yet You will bring up my soul from ruin, Yahweh, my Elohim."

Ps. 88:3, "For my soul is sated with misfortunes, and my life has drawn near unto the unseen (sheol; hades)." Vs. 4, "I am counted with them who descend into the pit ..."

Vs. 5, "Among the dead I am free, like the slain that lie in the grave." Jacob, speaking of his dying says, "Surely I will go down mourning towards the unseen (sheol; hades), unto my son." (Gen 37:35; cf ch's. 42:38 & 44:29,31) I Sam. 2:6, "Yahweh doth kill, and makes alive -- He takes down to the unseen (sheol; hades) and brings up." So what does the Lord mean here in Rev. 5:3? We see in the verses above that the unseen is associated with (although not identical to) the grave. Obviously, those in a grave are no longer seen. But is this what the Lord is speaking of here? Is he referring to the dead?

Or, is this referring to those (being dead) in hades (the unseen)?

Ps. 9:17 "The wicked shall return to the unseen (sheol; hades)"

16:10 "For You shall not forsake my soul in the unseen (s.; h.)"

18:4, "The cables (meshes; Roth.) of death have enveloped me,

5, The cables (meshes; R.) of the unseen (s.; h.) surrounded me;"

55:15 "May death lure them away; may they descend to the unseen (s.; h.)
alive."

86:13 "... and You have rescued my soul from the unseen (s.; h.) beneath."

139:8 "And should I make my berth (couch) in the unseen (s.; h.), You are
there."

Prov. 15:11 "The unseen (s.; h.) and destruction are before Yahweh"

24 "The way of life is upwards to the prudent, that he MAY DEPART
from the unseen (s.; h.) beneath."

Prov. 23:13,14 "Withhold not from a youth correction ... You with the rod
shall smite him, and you shall deliver his soul from the unseen (s.; h.)."

Some of these verses would seem to refer to a literal death and subsequent entrance into sheol, the unseen, which is referred to as being "beneath." What we must consider is whether the term "beneath" is literal or figurative. Tradition has said that it is literal. Yet God continually sits upon His throne; His throne is in the heavens (which are "above"); but David says that if he makes his bed in the unseen (sheol; hades) that God is there. Of course God is everywhere -- that was David's point. But, this seems to me to suggest that the unseen (sheol; hades) is a condition rather than a place. David was speaking figuratively, but in what way? Did he mean that if he made a mess of things in his life that God was still there to help him? Or, did he mean that if he ordered his life and lived in such a way that he would be judged as wicked (Ps. 9:17) and end up in the unseen, that even in that condition (or, place; or, sphere) that God would still be present and even, perhaps, there to help him?

Let's look at another scene. Turn to Is. 14. Let me begin by saying that most scholars agree that Ezk. 28 is a parallel passage to this, and I agree, so I may make occasional reference to it while considering the subject of Is. 14. This is a subject all its own, but perhaps it will shed some light upon our current discussion.

The setting is when Israel is given rest upon their own soil (which is also Yahweh's -- vs. 2) and they are taking captive their captors. [Can we see a figure here of entering into His rest and overcoming?] They are to take up a taunt (Roth.; "proverb"--CVOT; "simile"--Young) concerning the king of Babylon. It begins in vs. 4.

The oppressor has ceased; Yahweh has broken the staff of the wicked and the scepter of rulers. In vs. 9, since he was laid low, the unseen (s.; h.) beneath is disturbed at him and, among other things, makes all the kings of the nations to rise from their thrones. [Do we get the sense that this is a figurative piece?] In vs. 10 we see that he has been made weak (strengthless, ill) like the kings of the earth! [this could not possibly be describing a spirit, a principality of the heavenlies, or Satan] His pride is brought down to the unseen (sheol; hades), "the maggot is berthing under you, and the worm is covering you." (vs. 11, CVOT) Maggots eat flesh; worms eat flesh & earth.

"How you have fallen from the heavens [Eden, God's paradise -- Ezk. 28:13]." So here we have a fall from one place (realm, or, condition): the heavens, to another place: the unseen, the recesses of the pit (vs. 15), yet "These verses [16-20a] seem to take place on earth, not in the realm of the dead (Sheol)." (NIV Study Bible) This is also the place of maggots and worms. Ezk. 28:2 says, "Because your heart is lofty (haughty), and you have said, 'I am a god (or, I am God),'whereas you are Adam (a man) and not God." This last phrase is repeated

in vs. 9, then in vs.17 it says, "Upon the earth did I cast you," and in vs. 18, "And I turned you to ashes [Heb. also means "dust"] on the ground (earth)."

Without diverging to a lengthy study on this subject, let me just point out that it would seem to me that there are really only two conditions, places, or realms: heaven and earth. These two are contrasted throughout the Scriptures. The unseen, from our look at Is. & Ezk., above, seems to be upon (or, in a figure, within) the earth. Death and corruption are the conditions of one who is in the unseen -- be these literal, or figurative. Both lack light and life.

Now let's look at I Pet. 3:18-20, where we read of Christ "being indeed put to death in the flesh, but made alive by Spirit, in Which also, being gone to the spirits in prison, He preached to the ones once unpersuaded (uncompliant) when the patience of God was waiting in the days of Noah..." Where was this prison? The text does not say. We can presume, I think, that the prison was (or, was in) the unseen.

From all of this, I think the term "down under the earth" of Rev. 5:3 refers in figure to the unseen: the sheol of the Hebrew; the hades of the Greek.

That no one had power, was this not the state of man (the former "shining one" of Is. 14) before the emergence of the Lamb of God on the earth?

"Stop crying!" (vs.5, Barclay trans.) This means, "there is a solution!" (Barclay) "Swete has an interesting comment on this. John was weeping and yet his tears were unnecessary. Human grief often springs from insufficient knowledge. If we had patience to wait and trust, we see that God has his own solutions for the situation which brings us tears." (Barclay)

The title, Lion of the tribe of Judah, goes back to Gen. 49:9, where Jacob prophetically blesses his sons. Note that this is also one of the faces [identities, characters, aspects] of the living ones. This title speaks of the royal, kingly quality of Christ. The next phrase, "the Root of David," is a image from Is. 11:1 & 10, and further identifies this one as the promised Messiah, Who had His natural lineage through David; the One spoken of throughout the Scriptures. This ties Christ to the continued line of God's people. There is one continuous plan.

He overcame (conquered) -- or, as this is the Gr. aorist tense, "He overcomes (Conquers)" -- His work still applies, He is still overcoming in us. Now He has the power to open the scroll and loose, or destroy, its seals.

Note in vs. 6 that the Little Lamb is standing within the midst of the throne. He is the same today as He was yesterday [Heb. 13:8]: the slaughtered sacrifice; yet now ascended to His Father's throne -- He rules! Now also the Little Lamb has seven horns - complete power ["All authority within heaven and upon earth is given (was given) to Me" (Mat. 28:18)].

Upon the Little Lamb are also seven eyes, which we are told are the Seven Spirits of God Who are sent forth into all the earth. We have this figure from Zech. 3:9, "For lo, the stone that I put before Joshua, on one stone are seven eyes;" and Zech. 4:10, "... these seven are the eyes of Yahweh running to and fro throughout all the earth."

Let's look at some other verses that speak of the Lord's eyes:

Matt. 6:22, "The lamp of the body is your eye. If, then, your eye should be single, your

whole body will be enlightened." This would be true of His body.

Ps. 32:8, "I will guide you with My eye." (NKJV) "My glance will control you, and guide." (Fenton)

Ps. 33:18, "Behold, the eye of Yahweh is toward those fearing Him, toward those waiting for His goodness."

Ps. 34:15, "The eyes of Yahweh are toward the righteous." (CVOT)

Ps. 101:6, "My eyes are with the faithful of the land, to dwell with me." (CVOT)

Prov. 15:3, "In every place are the eyes of Yahweh, observing the evil and the good."

Prov. 22:12, "The eyes of Jehovah have kept knowledge" (Young)

Eph. 1:18, "The eyes of your heart having been enlightened that you may know..."

In regard to these seven eyes, Barclay says of this picture, "... quite clearly it stands for the omniscience of God ... there is no place on earth which is not under the eye of God." Yet, perhaps there is more than signifying that God knows all and sees all. They are sent forth with a mission, as apostles. Could this be a reference to God's "seers," His prophets, a part of His Body?

In vs. 7 the Little Lamb goes and takes the scroll from out of the right hand of the One continuously sitting upon the throne. The call of the strong messenger of vs. 2 has been answered. One who humbled Himself to become a servant (Phil. 2:7) now possesses all power and moves to the place of God's power (the right hand) and takes control of this most significant scroll. He now has the ability to loose the seals and begin the process to bring forth His life into the universe. The action of taking the scroll causes the four living ones and the 24 elders to fall in worship before the Little Lamb (vs. 8) and sing a new song (vs. 9).

Note that this worship is before the throne and before the Little Lamb. If we look back to the types and shadows of the O.T. we will find that praise and worship and prayer before the throne only happened in the Tabernacle of David, which he set up to house the Ark of the Covenant (II Sam. 6:17, "And they brought in the Ark of the Lord, and set it in His place, in the midst of the Tabernacle that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord."). Prior to this, when the Ark was in the Tabernacle of Moses, only the high priest could enter into the Holy of Holies (a type of this present scene here in Rev. 4&5) once a year on the Day of Atonement. In David's tent there was no veil and he was neither a priest nor a Levite, yet he had access to the Mercy Seat (the Throne of Grace -- Heb. 4:16).

See I Chron. 25:1-7 where David set up 24 Orders of Singers "for song in the house of the Lord, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God ..." (vs. 6). We see here in Rev. that the 24 elders have worship instruments and bowls brimming with things offered in sacrifice and they sing a new song. The Tabernacle of David was a type of the heavenlies, the realm of spirit and worship, in which Christ is the Priest-King after the Order of Melchisedec (typified by David), and in which the church offers up sacrifices of praise and sing the new song.

Note that what the 24 elders figuratively offer (the bowls of incenses) are defined in vs. 8 as "the PRAYERS of the set-apart (holy) ones." This scene is a picture of the church in worship of the Crucified Christ. "Let my prayer be before Thee counted as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice." (Ps. 141:2)

In vs. 9 we see that the church, His separated ones, continuously, or habitually, sings a new song (representative of the New Covenant) of praise to Christ for what He has done: He was slaughtered, and thus bought us for God. This purchase was transacted "within Your Blood" and was made "out of every tribe and tongue and people and multitude (nation)."

This shows that the work of Christ went beyond the Jews and Israel and that this scene is representative of the universal church, of which the covenant with Israel was the type. He gave His life a ransom for MANY (Mk. 10:45). Also, "Christ redeemed us from out of the curse of the law..." (Gal.3:13)

Vs. 10 continues the song, saying that those whom He bought He makes (forms into) kings and priests, and that these are to rule as kings upon the earth. This also shows a break from the old covenant, for under the old both kings and priests had to descend from the blood line of either a king or a priest, respectively. These are taken from every tribe, tongue & nation. Yet the type is followed, in the sense that this purchase was made within His blood. Thus we, being placed within His blood, are in His blood line. We are born again and are made sons of God; His sons. He being a priest & king, His sons are priests & kings. He, the Last Adam, has joined us to Himself and to the place of dominion that the first Adam had: to reign upon the earth. This is restoration.

The next phase of this vision is the perception by John of countless multitudes of messengers (agents) forming a circle around the throne and around those about the throne (vs. 11). They, too, continuously give witness of the worthiness of the Little Lamb, but they say something a little different than what the new song said, above. The elders & living ones say that He is worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, but these say He is worthy "to take THE POWER, even wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing." (vs. 12) Is this perhaps an expansion, or an explanation, of the significance of the scroll and its being opened? Does this eulogy perhaps describe the kingdom? Is the scroll not only the plan and purpose of the ages, the plan of redemption, the Word pertaining to Christ, but also the power, authority and blessings of the Kingdom of God?

Next (vs. 13), all creation in every realm & all places echo a witness back to God, and to those described in this scene, the last part of the eulogy just pronounced by the countless groups of agents. This is a universal pledge of allegiance by all creation to God and to Christ. "Wherefore, also, God highly exalts Him, and graces Him with the Name that is above every name, that in the Name of Jesus every knee should be bowing, celestial and terrestrial and subterranean, and every tongue should be acclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord, for the glory of God, the Father." (Phil. 2:9-11 CLNT) Paul apparently had the same vision that John had.

Vs. 14: those who are alive to Him say, "Amen (so be it; it is so)!" Those who are old in the Lord (not babes) will fall before Him and worship when they perceive the magnitude and all-inclusiveness of Who He is and what He has done. "Now the chorus of praise goes so far that it cannot go farther, for it reaches throughout the whole of the universe and the whole of creation." (Barclay)

The question is: did John see something that then existed in heaven, in the spirit realm? did he see something that existed then and continued to exist into the present? did he see something that would exist in the future? Was this a case of God "calling the things not being (existing) as being (existing)"? (Rom. 4:17) Perhaps the answer is "Yes" to all these questions. If we agree that what John saw here was what Moses saw and built a pattern of, or he saw the shadow of this at least, then what John saw perhaps existed from the foundation of the world, for Jesus was "the Little Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." (Rev. 13:8) This is His unveiling, and He is the same yesterday, today and into the ages. So, in regard to the Lamb and the One on the throne, we can say that this is a sort of

timeless scene.

But the event of the song that the four living ones & the 24 elders sing (vs. 9) has its origin at the cross. Thus their existence here existed in John's time, and I think we can say the situation continues to exist.

What about the innumerable groups of agents surrounding this inner circle? I suspect the answer is yes to all the initial questions.

Yet, what about the situation described in vs. 13? I think that Rom. 8:18-25 speaks to this verse. This whole creation was still groaning in Paul's day, and I think that most of it is still groaning today. The sons of God have not yet been manifested, and "ourselves also possessing the first-fruit of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves waiting for sonship -- the redemption of our body." (vs. 23 - Diaglott) Thus I would say that only the first-fruit now speak the eulogy of ch.5:13, but in the future all creation will do so.