

THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

REVELATION 5 — WHO IS WORTHY?

Setting the Scene

The scene has not changed. We are still in the throne room John entered through the open door in Chapter 4. God is on the throne. The twenty-four elders and four living creatures surround Him. Worship fills heaven.

But John notices something he has not mentioned before. In the right hand of the One sitting on the throne is a scroll, written on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And suddenly the calm of Chapter 4 gives way to a problem: What's on the scroll? And, perhaps a more immediate problem shows itself: Who is worthy to open the scroll?

No one steps forward. No one in heaven, on earth or under the earth is able to open it or even look into it. John begins to weep. That is an extraordinary response. Why should an unopened scroll bring John to tears? Because this is about more than opening a document. The scroll represents the purposes of God moving toward their fulfillment. If no one can open the scroll, who can put things right? Who can bring God's purposes to completion?

Someone suggests that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, is worthy to open the scroll. At last—a conqueror. John turns to look. And he does not see a lion.

He sees a Lamb.

Lesson Summary

Revelation 5 centers on one great question: Who is worthy? John sees a sealed scroll in God's hand, but no one in all creation is worthy to open it. Then he hears that the Lion of Judah has overcome. Yet when John looks, he sees a Lamb standing as though slain.

That surprise takes us to the heart of the chapter. Yeshua conquers, but not in the way the world understands conquest. The Lion is the Lamb. His apparent defeat is His victory. After all, slain beings don't stand.

The Lamb takes the scroll, and heaven erupts in worship. The living creatures and elders fall before Him. Then myriads of angels join them, until finally every creature praises the One on the throne and the Lamb.

The worship keeps expanding because the work of the Lamb reaches far beyond one people or place. He has purchased people for God “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9). Here the fourfold language we introduced in Chapter 4 appears again: the reach of the Lamb is universal. No corner of creation lies beyond His claim.

The Big Idea

The Lion conquered by being the Lamb. Yeshua is worthy because He was slain, and His victory gathers people from every nation into God's kingdom of priests.

Opening Prayer

Father, open our eyes to see Yeshua as John saw Him—the Lion who conquers and the Lamb who was slain. Teach us what it means that He alone is worthy. And as heaven worships Him, help us to join that worship not only with our words, but with lives given to Your service. Amen.

Commentary

The Scroll

John sees “in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals” (5:1). The scroll is written on both sides. That is unusual enough to make us look backward in the Scriptures. When Moses came down from Sinai carrying the two tablets of the testimony, we are told, “the tablets were written on both sides; they were written on one side and the other” (Exodus 32:15). That does not necessarily mean that John's scroll is the tablets of the Torah, but John repeatedly expects us to recognize the Tanakh behind the images he uses. A document written on both sides would certainly have sounded familiar to readers who knew the story of Sinai.

Consider the capital letter A or H. When those are on a sheet of paper or a stone tablet, they would appear the same from either side. But a capital P or J would not do the same. Somehow, the story is told, the miracle occurred that the writing was the exact same on each side.

There is another important parallel in Ezekiel. The prophet sees a hand extended toward him holding a scroll, and that scroll also is “written on the front and back” (Ezekiel 2:9-10). It contains “lamentations, mourning and woe.” Ezekiel is then commanded to eat the scroll before delivering God's words to Israel (Ezekiel 3:1-3), and John will have his own experience of eating a scroll later in Revelation 10. Rather than trying to identify the scroll too narrowly, then, I think we should allow these Tanakh echoes to accumulate. This is a document that comes from God. It contains His purposes, His judgments and what He intends to accomplish.

And the phrase “both sides” matters since people on each side of the audience would have been able to see the words the same. Consider a performance of “theater in the round” and the actor holding the scroll or tablet from inside the circle. That same thing happens in synagogues to this day, when the Torah is read publicly. At a certain point of the service, a man holds the scroll high above himself, and the congregation is at that point “reading” it on its own. Thus, in a way, the ceremonies of today are reflecting what Ezekiel and Moses said and that John is here seeing. No one is excluded; all of us can and must read it for ourselves.

Remember in Chapter 1 we are told, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy” (1:3).

And it is completely sealed with seven seals. As we have already seen, the number seven regularly carries the sense of completeness in the book of Revelation. The point is not simply that somebody has put a lot of locks on the scroll. Until the appropriate person comes forward, God's purposes contained in the scroll remain inaccessible. Then a strong angel asks the question that governs the whole chapter: “Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?” (5:2). Notice that the question is not who is strong enough, clever enough or powerful enough. The question concerns worth.

John looks throughout creation, but no one in heaven, on earth or under the earth is able to open the scroll or even to look into it (5:3). Kings cannot do it. Prophets cannot do it. Angels cannot do it. No great person from Israel's history can do it. The search encompasses everything and comes up empty. John begins to weep, and this is no polite tear. Something has gone terribly wrong if God's purposes for His creation are contained in the scroll and there is no one worthy to open it.

The Lion of Judah

Then one of the elders tells John not to weep because someone has conquered: “Behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome” (5:5). Those titles are loaded with Israel's story. The Lion takes us back to Jacob's blessing of Judah in Genesis 49, where Judah is described as a lion's cub and Jacob declares that the scepter will not depart from Judah (Genesis 49:9-10). From Judah would come the royal line. The Root of David takes us to Isaiah's promise that a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse and a branch from his roots will bear fruit (Isaiah 11:1). A few verses later Isaiah speaks of the root of Jesse standing as a signal for the peoples, and the nations will seek Him (Isaiah 11:10). Lion, Judah, David and king all belong together.

The elder says that this Lion “has overcome.” That word should sound familiar by now. Yeshua repeatedly promised rewards “to the one who overcomes” in His messages to the seven congregations. Now we discover that their overcoming is grounded in His overcoming. They are being called to follow the One who has already conquered. Everything about the elder's announcement therefore prepares John—and us—to see the victorious Messiah. John turns to see the Lion.

A Lamb Standing as Though Slain

But when John looks, he sees “a Lamb standing, as if slaughtered” (5:6). That sentence almost contradicts itself. Slain beings don't stand. Yet this Lamb does. The marks of slaughter have not disappeared, either. John does not see a Lamb who once suffered but now bears no evidence of it. The Lamb stands victorious while still appearing as one who has been slain. The Lion and the Lamb are not two different pictures of Yeshua between which we must

choose. John hears Lion and sees Lamb because this is how the Lion conquered. The Lion conquered by being the Lamb.

The Lamb Who Has All Authority

The Lamb John sees is not helpless. He has “seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth” (5:6). Once again the symbolism of the number seven points us toward completeness. Throughout the Tanakh the horn is associated with strength and power, so seven horns portray complete power and authority. (1 Samuel 2:1, Psalm 18:2, Psalm 89:17, 24, Daniel 7:7-8, 20-24, Zechariah 1:18-21) The seven eyes suggest complete sight and knowledge. This Lamb who appears to have been slaughtered is neither powerless nor defeated. The appearance of weakness and the reality of power exist together in the same person.

John also identifies the seven eyes with “the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.” We encountered this language earlier in Revelation, and Isaiah again helps us. Isaiah speaks of the Spirit of the LORD resting upon the promised descendant of Jesse—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and strength, knowledge and the fear of the LORD (Isaiah 11:1-2). One should not imagine seven different Holy Spirits. The number seven again speaks of fullness. The Spirit of God rests fully upon the Messiah and is sent out into all the earth.

This makes John's surprise even greater. The Lamb bears the evidence of having been slain, but He possesses complete authority, complete knowledge and the fullness of the Spirit of God. What appeared to be defeat has turned out to be victory. The world knows how to recognize the power of an emperor or a lion. Revelation asks us to recognize the power of the slain Lamb.

The Lamb Takes the Scroll

Then something remarkable happens. The Lamb comes forward “and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne” (5:7). We can read that sentence too quickly. Only moments earlier a strong angel had searched all creation for someone worthy to open the scroll, and no one could be found. John had wept because there appeared to be no one capable of bringing God's purposes to fulfillment. Now the Lamb simply approaches the throne and takes the scroll from God's hand.

Daniel provides an important background to this scene. Daniel sees the Ancient of Days seated upon His throne, surrounded by the heavenly court. Then “One like a Son of Man” comes with the clouds of heaven and approaches the Ancient of Days. He is given dominion, glory and a kingdom so that all peoples, nations and languages will serve Him, and His kingdom will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:9-14). In Revelation 5, John sees Yeshua approach the One seated upon the throne and receive what no one else is worthy to take. This is not a new story disconnected from Israel's prophets. John is showing us the fulfillment of what Daniel had already seen.

The reaction in heaven tells us how important this moment is. As soon as the Lamb takes the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall down before Him (5:8). In Chapter 4 they fell before the One sitting on the throne. Now they fall before the Lamb. Revelation does not appear troubled by this. The worship given to God is now directed toward the Lamb as well, and before the chapter is finished the One sitting on the throne and the Lamb will receive blessing, honor, glory and dominion together (5:13).

A New Song

The elders have harps and golden bowls full of incense, which John tells us are “the prayers of the saints” (5:8). That is a beautiful image to place beside John's earlier concern for the suffering congregations. Their prayers have not disappeared. Heaven has not misplaced them. The prayers of God's people are present before His throne. We will see those prayers again as Revelation unfolds, particularly when the seals begin to open.

Then they sing “a new song” (5:9). The language of a new song is deeply rooted in the Psalms. Israel is repeatedly called to sing a new song to the LORD because He has acted in salvation and victory (Psalm 33:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). Isaiah likewise calls for a new song as God's saving work reaches “the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 42:10). The song is new because God has acted, and in Revelation 5 the decisive act is the death of the Lamb.

“Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (5:9). There is the answer to the question with which the chapter began. Who is worthy? The Lamb is worthy. And why is He worthy? Not because He avoided death, but because He was slain. His death has accomplished redemption.

The fourfold description matters as well: tribe, tongue, people and nation. We have already begun to notice how the number four can signify the universal, the breadth of the created order. Here the meaning is difficult to miss. The Lamb's saving work is not confined to one geographical corner or one ethnic people. People from throughout the nations are being purchased for God. Revelation will repeat this fourfold language several times more (7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). The redemption is not only for us Jewish people or for those who live in Jerusalem. It's for all people and all time. No wonder the shout of “Hallelujah!” should be our new song.

Kingdom and Priests

And what does the Lamb make of these redeemed people? “A kingdom and priests to our God.” (5:10) Revelation does not invent the idea of a priestly people. It grows out of Israel's calling. God's redeemed people are brought into His kingdom not simply to receive benefits, but to serve.

The song does not end with what the Lamb has rescued us from. It moves immediately to what He has rescued us for: “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God;

and they will reign upon the earth” (5:10). That language should sound familiar to anyone who knows the story of Israel. At Sinai, God told the Jewish people, “if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6).

Israel's calling was never intended to terminate with Israel. Notice God's reason even there at Sinai: “for all the earth is Mine.” Israel was chosen from among the nations, but chosen with the nations in view. A priest does not exist merely for himself. A priest serves God on behalf of others and represents God to others. Israel was called to live among the nations as God's holy people, displaying His character and making Him known.

Now John hears that same language sung around the throne. The Lamb has purchased people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation and made them a kingdom and priests. There is both continuity and expansion here. The priestly calling first given to Israel at Sinai now reaches people from the nations through the redeeming work of Yeshua. The Lamb has not merely assembled an audience for heaven. He has formed a people who belong to God and are called to serve Him.

That is an important correction to a Christianity concerned only with getting people safely into heaven. Revelation 5 has already shown us that heaven matters, but God's redeemed people are given a vocation. We are priests. We serve God, and we make Him known. The redeemed community joins God's purposes for the world rather than simply waiting for the world to end. We are called to serve the nations and tell them about the Lamb who was slain so that they too might join the worship of God.

And John adds the remarkable promise that “they will reign upon the earth” (5:10). We have already seen crowns and thrones in Revelation, but kingdom authority never becomes an excuse for self-importance. The pattern has already been established by Yeshua Himself. The Lion conquers by being the Lamb. The King reigns as the One who was slain. If we are a kingdom of priests who reign with Him, then our understanding of reigning must also be shaped by Him. Kingdom greatness looks like service.

Myriads of Myriads

John looks again, and the circle of worship suddenly becomes enormous. He hears “the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders,” numbering “myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands” (5:11). We are not meant to reach for a calculator. John's language tells us that the company surrounding the throne is beyond counting.

Once again Daniel echoes here. Daniel saw the Ancient of Days upon His throne while “thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him” (Daniel 7:10). John has already drawn us into Daniel's throne-room vision, and now even the language describing the heavenly multitude sounds like Daniel. But in

Revelation the multitude directs its praise toward the Lamb: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing” (5:12).

Notice again why He is worthy. Heaven does not sing, “Worthy is the Lion who destroyed His enemies.” It sings, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.” The cross has not become an embarrassing episode that Yeshua left behind once He returned to glory. The Lamb's sacrificial death remains at the center of heaven's understanding of His victory. His wounds do not contradict His kingship; they reveal what kind of King He is and what example we should follow.

Every Created Thing

Then the worship expands one more time. John hears “every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea” praising God (5:13). Earlier no one anywhere in creation was worthy to open the scroll. Now all creation has found the One who is worthy, and all creation responds.

“To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever” (5:13).

The wording is astonishing. The One sitting on the throne and the Lamb receive the same praise. John does not stop to explain how this works. He simply reports what he hears. The worship that filled Chapter 4 around the throne of God now includes the Lamb. The four living creatures answer, “Amen,” and the elders fall down and worship (5:14).

We began the chapter with a question: Who is worthy? Now we have our answer. The Lamb is worthy. He is worthy to take the scroll. He is worthy to open its seals. He is worthy because He was slain. He is worthy to receive power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory and blessing. And He is worthy to receive the worship of creation alongside the One who sits upon the throne.

The question is settled. The scroll can now be opened. And that is where Revelation 6 begins.

Takeaways

1. The question at the center of Revelation 5 is not who is powerful enough, but who is worthy. Yeshua alone is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals.
2. The Lion conquered by being the Lamb. What looked like weakness and defeat at the cross was actually God's means of victory.
3. The Lamb was slain, but He stands. His resurrection does not erase the cross; the Lamb's sacrificial death remains central to His identity and to heaven's worship.
4. The Lamb has purchased people for God from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. The fourfold language reminds us again of the universal reach of God's redemptive purposes.
5. We have been made a kingdom and priests. Redemption gives us not only a future but a calling: to serve God and make Him known to the nations.
6. Worship grows

from understanding who Yeshua is and what He has done. The more heaven sees of the Lamb, the larger the circle of worship becomes.

Memory Verse Revelation 5:12

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”

What’s Next?

The Lamb is worthy, and the scroll is now in His hands. In Revelation 6, He begins to break its seals. One by one, the first four seals release the famous riders commonly known as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Then John sees the souls of those who have been killed because of their faithful witness, crying out, “How long, O Lord?” Finally, the sixth seal brings terrifying upheaval and another question: “Who is able to stand?”

Chapter 5 has shown us who is worthy to open the scroll. Chapter 6 begins to show us what happens when He does.

Listen to some of the Original Teaching

This teaching was recorded in February 2015 in Sydney.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrmHy04hZ04&t=21s>

Much of the manuscript was given in “Kingdom and Priests — The Lion and the Lamb” on 20 November 2004, at Beth Messiah, Sydney.

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— VERSE BY VERSE COMMENTARY —



THE REVELATION OF YESHUA HA MASHIACH



THE WORTHY LAMB. THE FAITHFUL KING.
HOPE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE. LIGHT FOR THE NATIONS.

*"Blessed is the one who reads aloud
the words of this prophecy, and blessed
are those who hear, and who keep what
is written in it; for the time is near."* — REV. 1:3



CONFIDENCE IN HIM

He is worthy.
We are secure.



COMFORT FROM HIM

He is with us.
We will endure.



WORSHIP TO HIM

He is exalted.
We give Him glory.



ROOTED IN THE
HEBREW SCRIPTURES



GOD'S PEOPLE.
GOD'S PROMISES.



FOR EVERY TRIBE, TONGUE,
PEOPLE AND NATION

BOB MENDELSON

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