

# Revelation 5: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[ 0 : 00 ] Revelation chapter 5 And one of the elders said to me, And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

And they sang a new song, saying, Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God, from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing.

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 blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever.

And the four living creatures said Amen, and the elders fell down and worshipped. In chapter 4, John was brought up to witness the worship of the heavenly temple.

[ 2 : 20 ] Now, in chapter 5, the great events that will shake the entire world, events that will play out over the chapters that follow, start to be set in motion. The chapter begins with a scroll and with a problem.

There is a scroll on the right, not necessarily in the right hand, of the one on the throne. It's sealed with seven seals. Although a mighty angel asks who is worthy to open it, no suitable candidate is found.

The right hand is associated with authority and rule and deliverance. The lack of anyone to open the scroll implies the lack of anyone suitable to be at the Father's right hand. Peter Lighthouse argues that we get some sense of the significance of the book by considering the hymns that follow. Receiving the book is connected with receiving power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing. It's written on the front and on the back. This might suggest that it is some sort of covenant document.

In Exodus chapter 32 verses 15 to 16, this is the way that the tablets of the covenant are described. Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand.

[ 3 : 28 ] Tablets that were written on both sides, on the front and on the back they were written. The tablets were the work of God and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

Perhaps we should see the sealed document as the fulfilment of this covenant. A similar description of a book is given to us in Ezekiel chapter 2 verse 10. Elsewhere in Daniel chapter 7 we see another heavenly throne room scene with books that are opened.

As in Daniel chapter 7, this passage describes the advent of a figure to the heavenly throne room. A figure who will receive immense authority. As we look at these two passages alongside each other, we'll see a great many parallels.

This passage, we should assume, is set before the ascension. Christ as the slain lamb is ascending into the heavenly throne room to take his place at the Father's right hand. The coming of the lion of the tribe of Judah is the coming of one to sit down at the right hand of the Father.

It's the Davidic Son of God coming to take his place. The sealed book is most likely the book referred to in Daniel chapter 12 verse 4. But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end.

[ 4 : 48 ] Many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall increase. And chapter 12 verse 9. He said, Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end.

Now with the ascension of the Son of Man, with the ascension of the Lamb, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the time for the opening of the book and the initiation of the last days has come to pass. The book being opened then suggests that the time has come for the fulfilment of events foretold by the prophet Daniel. And unsurprisingly, in the next few chapters we will see several strong allusions to the prophecy of Daniel, not least in the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds to the Ancient of Days.

The angel seeks a worthy figure to open the scroll. Later, the living creatures, the 24 elders and the entire angelic company will praise the Lamb in hymns declaring his worthiness.

We should recall that the previous chapter ended with a statement of God's worthiness in verse 11. Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

[ 5 : 53 ] The figure suitable to open the scroll must demonstrate a worthiness that corresponds to God's own worthiness. There is a search for candidates in verse 3. In heaven, earth, and under the earth, and there is none to be found.

That the sea is not searched suggests that this is not a role that someone who is a Gentile could perform. It requires a Jew. John's response on the lack of anyone suitable to open the scroll is to weep.

He is a human participant in the scene in this action. He expresses the lamentation, the desire, and the longing for God's kingdom to come, and the deep yearning that there would be someone suitable to set it in motion.

Without such a figure, God's promised future would seem to be stillborn. And so his lament is on account of a deep problem, the lack of a figure who is worthy to usher in the age to come.

But yet he is instructed not to weep. Someone suitable has been found, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David. The connection of the lion with Judah goes back to Genesis chapter 49, verses 9 to 10, and the blessing of Jacob upon the tribes.

[ 6 : 58 ] Lion imagery suggests might and power and dominion.

It associates Jesus with the patriarch Judah, and presents the lamb as the full flowering and expression of the tribe of Judah's strength, their coming into full sovereignty. The title, the root of David, comes from Isaiah chapter 11, verse 1.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his root shall bear fruit. And verse 10. In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples, of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

Root of David language connects Jesus with David, but as one who exceeds him. The root of David's sovereignty and rule might be the foundation of the reign and authority of David himself. We can here recall Jesus' questioning of the Pharisees in Matthew chapter 22, verses 41 to 45. Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?

[ 8 : 19 ] They said to him, The son of David. He said to them, How is it then that David in the spirit calls him Lord, saying, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.

If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son? We have just been told of the lion of the tribe of Judah who has been conquered then, but immediately after being introduced to this figure, we don't see a lion, but a lamb, and what is more, a sacrificial lamb who has been slain.

This victory does not take the form that we might expect. The jarring juxtaposition of lion and lamb imagery should startle the reader. The victory of this figure is through suffering.

His conquest is through death. Commentators debate it, but in verse 6, We have already seen seven torches of fire identified as the seven spirits of God in chapter 4 verse 5.

This might suggest that the lamb takes up the place of the throne, and the seven spirits of God come to be associated with him and with his reign. This might be related to the vision of Zechariah chapter 3 and 4.

[ 9 : 34 ] We see in chapter 3 verse 9, For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.

The eyes now roam throughout the earth, which might be a progression, as Gregory Beale notes, The spirit, the seven eyes, have been given to the sun, and the spirit now works throughout all of the world, the eyes going out into the whole earth.

We should consider the similarities between the lamb and the beast that appear later in the book. The lamb has multiple eyes and horns, and is also like a lion. We should note that the beast in Daniel chapter 7 verse 8, in the related scene, has seven horns, after three of his initial ten horns are plucked out.

Another one of the beasts is like a lion. The lamb approaching the one seated on the throne in verse 7 corresponds with the scene of Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 and 14.

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days, and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.

[10:49] His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. The horns and the eyes might represent different aspects of kingdoms.

As he takes the scroll, the four living creatures and twenty-four elders start to worship the lamb. They make music and offer incense, like the priests in the temple. The incense is connected with the prayers of the saints, presumably prayers that God's kingdom would come.

The worship here is similar to that found at the end of chapter 4. That was on account of creation. This is on account of redemption. The worship here connects the worthiness of the lamb with the fact that he was slain.

His death was the means of conquest. By his death he ransomed people for God, from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.

This is taking up the language of Daniel chapter 7, verse 22 and 27. Judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

[11:51] And the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints, of the Most High. His kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominion shall serve and obey him.

We also see language like tribe and language and people and nation in verse 14 of chapter 7 of Daniel. Further Old Testament background is found in Exodus chapter 19, verses 5 and 6.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

The language of verses 9 to 10 is clearly alluding to that, but it has changed. No longer is this a special people that set apart from all other peoples, taken out of all the other peoples to be a treasured possession.

Now this kingly and priestly people has been taken from all tribes and tongues and peoples and nations. This is no longer just Israel. It is an international people that Christ is forming by his work.

[12:50] We start with the praise of the four living creatures and the 24 elders. And in verse 11 it expands so much more. The voices of the living creatures and the elders are joined by the voice of many angels, myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands.

John is here taking up the language of Daniel chapter 7 verse 10. Here the worthiness of the Lamb is to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing.

This language might allude to 1 Chronicles chapter 29 verses 11 and 12. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty. For all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours.

Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.

The worship of the Lamb here shows just how high a Christology John has. The Lamb here is receiving worship on a par to God himself, in a book that clearly speaks elsewhere about not offering worship to anyone but God alone.

[14:08] The chapter ends with the worship extending even further. Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea now as well are all joining in this song of worship.

And the worship now is addressed to the one on the throne and the Lamb together. They are the joint object of the whole creation's praise. A question to consider. How might this chapter instruct us in reforming our own worship?