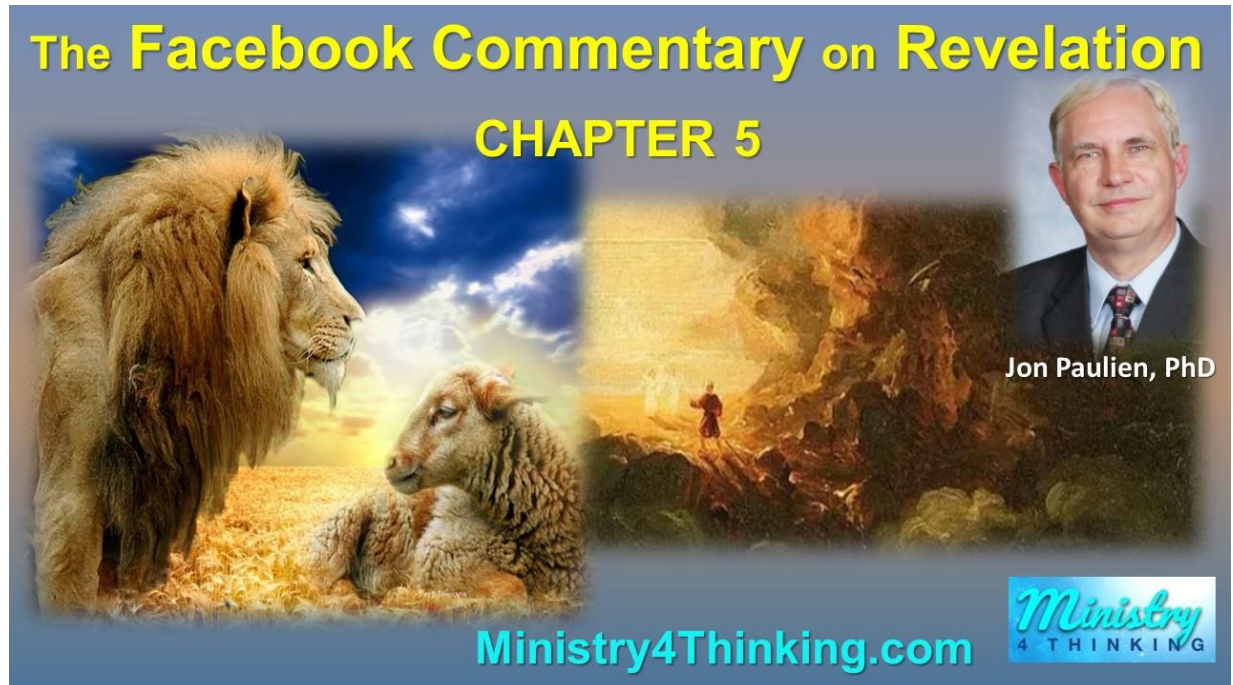




The Facebook Commentary on Revelation

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Revelation Chapter 5

Rev 5 (Introduction) Revelation chapter five is closely linked to the vision of chapter four. Revelation 4 is a general description of heavenly worship. There is no specific event in view there. The throne “was there” before the vision began and remains in place (Rev 4:2). The four living creatures say “holy, holy, holy” day and night (4:8). And “whenever” the four living creatures offer their three-fold “holy” the twenty-four elders join them in worship (4:9). This is a general description rather than a specific event. It does, however, set the stage for a specific event in chapter five.

With chapters five and twelve in mind, we can see that the “day and night” of the four living creatures (4:8) is in direct response to the “day and night” accusations of the “accuser of the brethren” (Rev 12:10). Satan’s absence from the account in chapter four is due to the refutation of his charges against God’s people and, by implication, against God Himself. So with chapters five and twelve in mind, the general description of chapter four does reflect the situation of the short period between the cross and the ascension of Jesus in AD 31 (Satan has “left” and Jesus has not yet arrived). It is likely during this time that the twenty-four elders took

up their post in the heavenly council (Matt 27:51-53; Eph 4:8), representing the human race before God. So chapter four sets the scene; something decisive is about to happen, and that is the topic of chapter five.

The key word of chapter four is “throne,” emphasizing God’s right to rule in the universe. What is the key word of chapter five? The word “throne” (Greek: *thronos*) remains central to the narrative. It appears fourteen times in chapter four and five times in chapter five. But several other words also move into prominence. The key word of chapter five, perhaps, is “worthy” (Greek: *axios*). If the throne represents right to rule, then a crucial question is, “Who is worthy (qualified) to sit on that throne, who is worthy to rule?” This theme picks up on 4:11 where the one sitting on the throne (presumably God the Father) is considered worthy to do so on account of creation. Coming back to chapter five, the key figure in question is the Lamb (Greek: *arnion*) that was slain, a clear reference to both Christ and the cross. In some sense the cross is the decisive element that resolves the crisis in the universe. The final key word is book or scroll (Greek: *biblion*). Sitting on the throne is not the only issue, there is the additional question of who is worthy to take the book, break its seals, and reveal its contents.

With chapter five the reader moves immediately from the general description of heavenly worship (chapter four) to a specific moment in time. A strong angel proclaims, “Who is worthy to open the book and break its seals?” Rev 5:2. It is an interesting challenge, since the book is in the possession of the one sitting on the throne. Evidently this challenge is announcing a problem so big that even the one sitting on the throne cannot solve it. The challenge is met initially with silence (5:3). John himself gets involved in the scene, weeping because no one was found worthy to open the book (5:4). He is then assured by one of the twenty-four elders that someone has been found that can open the book; the lion from the tribe of Judah (5:5). So the vision of chapter five clearly describes a point in time rather than a general description. This immediately raises our curiosity. When is that point in time? Just when in the course of earth’s history did this heavenly event take place? That is a question this commentary will attempt to answer after we have done some basic exegesis into the text.

In chapter four we saw that the main Old Testament background was Ezekiel 1, with additional references to the other throne texts of the Old Testament; Daniel 7, Isaiah 6, 1 Kings 22 and parallel in Chronicles, and Exodus 19. In chapter five Ezekiel 1 is not forgotten, but fresh references to Daniel 7 place that text into greater prominence than Ezekiel. When you compare Revelation 5 with Daniel 7:9-14 you see a number of significant verbal and thematic parallels. You have a picture of God on the throne, books that are either open or need to be opened, and the appearance of a second divine figure in both visions. In both visions, the second divine figure receives dominion and authority in the presence of the saints (Dan 7:27) or the twenty-four elders (Rev 5:8- representatives of the human race) and of a multitude of angels.

This strong foundation in Daniel 7 raises the question of whether or not Revelation 5 is a judgment scene like Daniel 7. That is a question that will also be addressed later. But as we move into more detailed exegesis of Revelation 5, it is important to note that this is a moment of crisis in heaven that seems of utmost importance to the whole universe and begs for resolution.

Rev 5:1- “And I saw **to the right** of the one sitting on the throne a scroll. . . .” “And I saw” (Greek: *kai eidon*) often introduces a new vision or a new phase within a vision (6:1; 8:2; 10:1). The translation “to the right” (Greek: *epi ten dexian*- the only occurrence of this exact phrase in the Bible) is deliberately ambiguous it is debated whether the Greek phrase means “in the right hand” or “at the right side” (of God). The Greek preposition *epi* does not mean “in” but rather “on” or “upon” (see use of *epi* in Rev 20:1). So rather than “in the right hand” of God, the intent might be “on the right hand,” the book being balanced on the open palm rather than held in the enclosed hand. Or, as Stefanovic prefers, the book is “upon or at the right side” of God. We tend to think of thrones as being like armchairs, but in ancient times they were often more like couches, where rulers could share their splendor or authority with others. Hence, Jesus is often portrayed as “at the right hand of God (Greek: *en dexia tou theou*- Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; Heb 10:12)” or “seated at the right hand of the throne” (Greek: *ekathisen en dexia tou thronou*- Heb 8:1, 12:2). If the throne is a couch, and the book lies on the couch at the right side of God, then the Lamb takes up the book in order to sit down with the Father on His throne (Rev 3:21; 22:1, 3; see also Matt 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42).

“And I saw to the right of the one sitting on the throne **a scroll, written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.**” The translation “scroll” (Greek: *biblion*) is chosen because of Rev 6:14. In the ancient world books took two primary forms. One is familiar to us today and is called a “codex” by scholars. In a codex, the pages are glued together at one end and that end forms a hinge by which the book can be opened. A codex would be sealed by tying or taping pages together at the open end. A portion of the codex, then could be sealed while another portion is still accessible. A scroll, on the other hand, is a long sheet of writing material that is rolled up when not being used. A scroll is sealed when completely closed and none of the interior contents of the scroll can be seen until all the seals have been broken. Is the book of Revelation 5 a codex or a scroll? Revelation 6:14 clarifies, “The sky was split open like a scroll (Greek: *biblion*) being rolled up.” So the word *biblion* in Revelation means a scroll rather than a codex.

That the word *biblion* in Revelation means scroll rather than codex is supported by the ancient evidence. The codex (printed books as we know them) seems to have been invented roughly around the time of Revelation. The earliest reference to the codex form is a brief mention by the Latin poet Martial (lived around 40-100 AD). Before Revelation the scroll (as in the “Dead Sea Scrolls”) was the predominant book form, but all manuscripts of the New Testament, including the very earliest fragments that we have (around 115-120 AD), are in the codex form. For this reason some suspect that the codex may have been a Christian invention, to foster the carrying of all four gospels or eventually the New Testament as a whole, something that would not have been possible with scrolls. The gradual replacement of the scroll form with the codex is thought by some to be the greatest advance in bookmaking until the invention of printing. But for the book of Revelation, the scroll is still the form the reader is to assume in the vision.

“And I saw to the right of the one sitting on the throne **a scroll, written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.**” It was customary with ancient scrolls to write on only one side, because that was more convenient for reading as the book is unrolled. But the scroll in this

verse is described as being written “within” (Greek: *esôthen*) and “on the back” (Greek: *opisthen*). This may allude to the scroll of Ezekiel 2:9-10 which written on the back (LXX: *opisthen*) and in front (LXX: *emprosthen*). Written within likely means written on the side that is hidden from view when the scroll is rolled up. In other words, the paper of the scroll is written on both sides, which is called an opisthograph, a very efficient use of scarce paper. Since the book was sealed, it meant that John could see writing on the outside and infer that it was also written on the inside. While most translations are supportive of the above, a simple shift of comma (which wasn’t used at the time of Revelation) would also make sense. Then the text would be saying that the scroll is written within, and on the back it is sealed with seven seals. Either reading is possible. A great mystery of Revelation is that while the scroll is of great importance in this chapter, it is never depicted as being read anywhere else in the book of Revelation.

One other possibility for the “inside and outside” would be that this is a covenant scroll in the form of a double document. Covenants were often inscribed on clay tablets where a completed tablet was covered with fresh clay and the contents repeated or summarized outside. The whole (if brief enough) covenant may be visible on the outside layer, but in case someone suggests that tampering has occurred with the text outside, the outer layer can be broken, revealing the inner tablet and its contents to certify whether or not the outer text was accurate. A similar result could be achieved with scrolls as well. Two identical scrolls could be produced. One would be left unsealed so that it could be consulted at any time. The other would be sealed (see Jer 32:6-15). So people could consult the open document to see what the law or directions were, but if there was ever a dispute, the sealed scroll could be opened and compared to make sure that no one had altered the open document. The sealed scroll would validate the scroll that was open and accessible. So the fact that the scroll of Revelation 5 is written on both sides could mean that it was a legal document.

“And I saw to the right of the one sitting on the throne a scroll, written within and on the back, **sealed with seven seals**.” There are a number of examples of seven-sealed scrolls in the ancient world (see Rev 5:1 [Excursus on the Identity and Contents of the Sealed Scroll] below). There were two reasons to seal a book in the ancient world. One was in order to validate the content of the scroll. For example, a king might stamp his seal on a document to make it official. The other reason to seal a book was to conceal or prevent access to its contents (Isa 29:11, see also Dan 6:17 and Matt 27:66). If the contents were not to be known until the seals were broken, sealing made sure that they remained hidden until the proper time. The scroll of Revelation 5 is sealed for concealment. This is evident from the key word chosen, “sealed down” (Greek: *katesphragismenon*). This means that the scroll is “sealed shut.” Since the number seven signifies completeness, the fact that there are seven seals may suggest that the content of the book is completely unknowable until the time of opening.

If the book were like modern books, one could seal up portions of it by taping the outer edges. But if the book is a scroll (as indicated by Rev 6:14), then none of the contents of the book (except perhaps the small portion of the writing on the back visible on a rolled-up scroll) is visible until ALL the seals are broken. That means that Revelation 6 does not successively reveal portions of the scroll. The breaking of the seals triggers events on earth, but these events are

not the contents of the scroll itself.

Rev 5:1 (Excursis on the Identity and Contents of the Sealed Scroll)- What is the identity and significance of the sealed scroll? Readers wish the author of Revelation had been more specific about its content and also about what happens when Jesus breaks the seals in chapter six. What kind of book was it? What was inside? Let's look at the evidence together in my own translation of Revelation 5:1-5:

"And I saw to the right of the one sitting on the throne a scroll, written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a powerful angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll, namely, to break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. And I wept much because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has overcome to open the scroll and its seven seals."

The contents of the scroll is an interesting mystery of decisive importance. In this Excursus we will attempt to get a little closer to understanding it.

The first observation toward an understanding of the identity and contents of book is that it is clearly a scroll and not a codex as noted earlier (see Revelation 6:14). This rules out the possibility that the content of the scroll is revealed in the breaking of the seals in Revelation 6. We should not look to chapter six for an understanding of the identity and contents of the book. The scroll is not opened until all seven seals are broken. Only then can its full contents be revealed. So the events that occur in chapter six, for example, are not the contents of the scroll but events on earth leading up to the revelation of the scroll's contents.

What is sealing of the scroll all about? Sealing of people was associated with circumcision (in early Judaism) and baptism (in second century Christianity). That would suggest it represents the moment of conversion, when a person comes into genuine relationship with God. It is a sign of ownership showing that people belong to God when they become Christians (Revelation 14:1 and Ephesians 1:13). So the sealing of people, in particular, seems to be a sign of God's mark--God's ownership--of them. But when people are sealed (metaphorically) in Revelation 7:2, it is a mark of protection (see also Revelation 9:4) that is offered to those already sealed in the first sense.

But in Revelation 5 a book is being sealed instead of a person. What does it mean to seal a book? As noted above, there were two basic concepts that arose in relation to sealing a book in the ancient world. On one hand, it can involve the concealing of its contents. Because the book is sealed, no one can see inside it and its contents are unknown. On the other hand, in the ancient world, seals were used by kings to validate documents. A book might be sealed to validate its contents (like deeds, birth certificates, etc.) The seal certifies that the contents of the book accurately reflect the wishes of the authority that sealed the book.

Which of the different options for the meaning of sealing applies to what is going on in Revelation 5? The issue seems to be more about concealing and revealing than validation or certification. The scroll is already validated by the simple fact that it is in God's possession. The description of the book as being written on the inside and the back, is more appropriate to the

scroll form than the codex form (see comments on Rev 5:1 above). There is not a hint in the chapter that this scroll is a double document (see comments on Rev 5:1 above). If it were, a duplicate copy would be open for consultation and the sealed scroll would simply serve as validation in the event that the open scroll had been tampered with. But the contents of this scroll will not be readable until all of the seals are broken.

In the comments on Revelation 5:1 above I preferred to locate the scroll *to the right* of God rather than in God's hand. This is based on the research Ranko Stefanovic did for his PhD dissertation at Andrews University (a dissertation I supervised). In verse one he preferred to translate "at the right side" (Greek: *epi tēn dexian*) rather than "in the right hand."

It was generally felt in the ancient world that the right side of the king was the highest place of honor. In Psalms 80:17 and 110:1, the king of Israel is described as sitting at God's right side. This meant that God and the king were co-rulers of Israel. Many ancient thrones were large enough for three to four people to sit, more like a couch than an armchair. Stefanovic believes that the scroll was lying on the throne at God's right side. If that is so, to take up the book (Rev 5:7) is also to sit at God's right side (see also Revelation 3:21). The one picking up the scroll would be taking on the role of the Davidic kingship, the one destined to rule Israel. That the throne scene of Revelation 5 is about the Davidic kingship is further supported in verse five. The *Overcomer* (the Lamb, according to verse six) is "the Lion of Judah" and the "root of David." In other parts of the New Testament, Jesus is portrayed as sitting down at the right hand of His Father on the throne in heaven (Matt 26:64; Heb 8:1, etc.). It seems pretty clear that when Jesus comes and picks up that scroll, He is in fact, being enthroned in the heavenly sanctuary.

The references to the Davidic kingship (lion of Judah, root of David) need to be understood in the context of Israel's history as portrayed in the Old Testament. God promised David (2 Sam 7:8-16) that his throne and his dynasty would last forever. Yet his own grandson, Rehoboam, lost ten of the twelve tribes to Jeroboam. And with the exile to Babylon many centuries later, David's descendant, Jehoiachin, was taken to Babylon and kept in a prison there for 37 years. While in old age Jehoiachin was treated kindly (2 Kings 25:27-30; Jer 52:31-34), the throne was never restored to him or to any of his descendants. While the Maccabean kingdom attained independence for about a hundred years, the Maccabees were not descendants of David, so the Davidic kingship was not restored by them. At the time of Jesus, therefore, the promises made to David remained unfulfilled and there was the hope that God would restore the kingship to David when the Messiah came. When the followers of Jesus proclaimed Him as the Messiah, it is not surprising that they also saw in Him the fulfillment of the promises to David that his dynasty would last forever. So when the Lamb takes the scroll he is assuming the kingship of David that had been lost in the Babylonian exile.

Associating the scroll of Revelation 5 with the Davidic kingship doesn't answer the question of the content of the scroll by itself. Let's take a look at some other Old Testament background options concerning the content of the scroll.

1) A Roman will. When a person makes a will, the contents of the will concern the things that he or she owns and what sums or items go to various people. There are examples of Roman wills where seven witnesses all placed their seal on that document indicating they they

knew what is in it and that everything had been properly done. If this is what John had in mind, the Lamb opening the book means that the inheritance is guaranteed. In this case, the inheritance would be eternal life and the refutation of the satanic charges against God. This is an appealing interpretation, but is not conclusive. While the scroll in Revelation 5 is clearly a legal document but it's not clear what kind of legal document it is. Even though an ancient inheritance scroll would look exactly like this, it isn't the only legal document that would. Additionally, the idea of inheritance is not developed elsewhere in Revelation as one would expect if that were the meaning of such an important document.

2) Related to the Roman will interpretation is the Old Testament law of the *go=el*. In Old Testament Israel, if a person died childless or if they lost or squandered their inheritance, a family member could step in and buy the property back or restore it to the family. In Jeremiah 32:6-15, Jeremiah redeems the property of a relative and certifies the purchase with a double document; duplicate scrolls, one sealed and the other open. If that is the kind of thing that is happening in Revelation 5, the Lamb is taking up the title deed to the world. Adam lost his inheritance through sin, and Jesus as the second Adam redeemed that inheritance at the cross. This appealing idea suffers from the same shortcomings as the Roman will idea. In addition, there is a lack of evidence that the scroll of Revelation 5 is a double document like the one in Jeremiah.

3) The scroll of Ezekiel 2-3. The scroll which Ezekiel ate in these chapters was sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach, like what happens in Revelation 10. "Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. And he said to me, 'Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel.' So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, 'Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.' So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth." Ezekiel 2:9-3:3.

It is possible that the scroll of Ezekiel is the scroll behind Revelation 5 since Revelation 10 is clearly built on this incident in Ezekiel's ministry. Are the scrolls of Revelation 5 and 10 related? Possibly, even though a different word for scroll is used (Greek: Rev 5B *biblion*, Rev 10B *biblaridion*). Both are diminutives of *biblos* (as in *A little book*). Certainly Ezekiel 2 and 3 provide a structural parallel to Revelation 10. But there is much less evidence for the Ezekiel scroll as a background to Revelation 5. While the scrolls of Ezekiel and Revelation 10 are already opened, the scroll of Revelation 5 is sealed. There is a further problem with this view. If the contents of the Revelation were the same as Ezekiel's scroll--lament, mourning, and woe--why would John weep with his desire for the scroll to be opened? Better to leave such a scroll closed. So this suggestion is probably not the answer.

4) A concealed prophecy. One of the most striking options for the identity and contents of the sealed scroll can be found in Isaiah. "For you this whole vision is nothing but words sealed in a scroll. And if you give the scroll to someone who can read, and say to him, 'Read this, please,' he will answer, 'I can't; it is sealed (Isa 29:11). . . . = In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see (Isa 29:18).@ The scroll Isaiah is describing is sealed, but down the line in history, the scroll will be

opened up and everyone can see it. A further verse nearby is of interest. "Go now, write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it on a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness." Isaiah 30:8.

In Isaiah, this sealed prophecy is Isaiah's own book. By extension of this idea, if the Old Testament background of Revelation 5 is Isaiah 29, the content of the scroll in Revelation would be the book of Revelation itself. Unfortunately, there are no strong structural parallels between Isaiah 29-30 and the larger context of Revelation 5. So, this suggestion is probably not the best way to go either.

5) The Lamb's book of life. Outside of chapter five there is "the Lamb's book of life" (Rev 21:27, cf. 13:8). This is the only book in Revelation that is clearly defined as the "Lamb's book." If the scroll of Revelation 5 is the book of life, it would explain the nature of the crisis in chapter five and of John's weeping that the book cannot be opened. He would be weeping that without a "worthy" person to open the book, no one on earth would be saved. This is a very appealing possibility, but the nature of the cosmic conflict addressed in chapter twelve and hinted at in chapter five suggests that the book of life has a more narrow focus than the universal crisis described so dramatically in Revelation 5.

6) The coronation scroll of the Israelite kings. When an Israelite king took the throne, he was given the scroll of the book of the covenant--the Book of Deuteronomy. "When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over the kingdom of Israel." Deuteronomy 17:18-20.

Deuteronomy lays out the expectation and there are at least two places in the Old Testament where this is described as actually happening. At his coronation, King Joash was crowned and also received "a copy of the covenant" (2 Kings 11:12), presumably the scroll of Deuteronomy. Both of these elements certified that he had been chosen to be king and now had the authority to act as king. In the case of young King Josiah, he received the book of the covenant and immediately began to give royal orders concerning the temple and the priesthood (2 Kings 23:1-9).

In the background of Deuteronomy 17, we find the combination of the scroll with the throne, which is the third emblem of right to rule. This means that it is quite possible that the scroll of the covenant is the best background for Revelation 5. The ability to open the scroll represents the right to rule. But there is one problem with the thesis, there is no explicit allusion to Deuteronomy 17 in Revelation 5 nor is Deuteronomy a major structural background to the text.

I would conclude that each of the potential Old Testament backgrounds to the sealed scroll have some connection with our text. Among others, the options we have explored are the concepts of inheritance and world destiny, Ezekiel's theme of judgment, concealment of the knowledge of God's plan, the redemption of God's people, and the coronation of the Israelite king. Is it possible to make a sound choice between these various options?

The interpretation of the scroll that in my view best ties all the possible interpretations together is that it represents the mystery of God. "But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, **the mystery of God** will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets." Revelation 10:7. See notes on Rev 10:7 for detail on the mystery of God.

(http://www.thebattleofarmageddon.com/fb_com/Facebook%20Comm%20on%20Rev%2010_update.pdf) The mystery of God is His great eschatological plan to redeem the whole universe through the actions of Christ. In the New Testament, God=s mystery was open to Jesus' followers but closed to those who didn't know Him. It was a "now and not yet" situation. If this is what God or John had in mind, it would suggest that the opening of the scroll only comes at the consummation of history. The Amystery of God@ is something that Christians already understood, but would only be open to the world at the very end. In a real sense, the scroll of Revelation 5 is the Revelation of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1) as the One who most clearly reveals what God is like.

We have seen that the book of Revelation opens with a chain of revelation; from God, to Jesus, to John (Rev 1:1-3). It is only when the reader gets to Revelation 5 that one can see God handing something to Jesus. Interestingly, Jesus (the mighty angel) hands the book to John in Revelation 10. Perhaps we see two phases of the chain of Revelation 1 in Revelation 5 and 10. What Jesus receives from God is not the book of Revelation itself but the whole of God's purpose for the human race and the universe. That would explain the crisis of Revelation 5. The crisis was so big that even God couldn't solve it. The scroll contained the entire plan of God and it could not be activated until the scroll is open. In a sense, the stability of the universe is lost if the scroll cannot be opened.

What would it take to open the scroll? According to the text, it required the cross. Experiencing the cross is what made the Lamb worthy. That means that the entire destiny of the human race and the universe as a whole was not assured until the cross. The cross is the decisive event that enables God to open up His plan and implement it in the universe. In this chapter, the cross is closely associated with the enthronement of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. The one makes the other possible. While Christ=s rule over the earth is hidden from public view until the End, it was already put into effect at His ascension to heaven.

Where do the saints catch a glimpse of this plan of God hidden inside the sealed scroll? In the book of Revelation itself. In a real sense, the content of the scroll is the book of Revelation and much, much more. The content of the scroll is the Revelation of Jesus Christ as glimpsed in outline in the book of Revelation. I would like to suggest that the Revelation 5 scroll represents God's plan for the universe, and that through the cross and the enthronement of Jesus this plan is set in motion and the final events of earth's history are now assured, God's people will be redeemed, the universe will be saved, and the day will come when all creatures will worship Him.

The decisive element of the scene is the enthronement of Jesus, when the plan of God becomes activated. A brief review of the evidence may be helpful. The scroll is "at the right side" of the throne. The tribe of Judah and the root of David point to the Davidic kingship. Jesus saying , "I joined My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21), in anticipation of Revelation 5. The

concept of the One Who is worthy and therefore able to open the book (both expressions of royalty). Based on all of these evidences, the decisive meaning of Revelation 5 would be the enthronement of the Davidic king (as anticipated in Deuteronomy 17 and throughout the Old Testament).

This concept fits beautifully with a number of major New Testament themes. At His ascension Jesus sat down at the right hand of God. The kingship of Jesus is "now and not yet." The gospel is the revelation of the mystery of God to those who accept it and a concealment of the same to those who don't. Revelation 5 portrays that point in history where the destiny of the universe is assured in Christ and on account of the cross. But this scene is not the final consummation, there are many things that must yet take place before the reward of the righteous can be distributed. The book of Revelation begins with the moment when the plan of God is fully activated to its conclusion at the end of all things.

I'd like to close this excursus with a favorite quote about how the opening of the seals are the steps Christ must take for the destiny of all men.

"(The Jewish leaders) said, 'His blood be on us, and on our children.' Matthew 27:24-25. Thus the Jewish leaders made their choice. Their decision was registered in the book which John saw in the Hand of Him that sat upon the throne, the book which no man could open. In all its vindictiveness this decision will appear before them in the day when this book is unsealed by the Lion of the tribe of Judah." Christ's Object Lessons, 294.

This statement can be used in support of the Scroll of judgment approach (Ezek 2 and 3), but that is challenging in light of John's weeping. It seems to me it calls for a more comprehensive approach to the meaning and identity of the scroll, which I have offered above, the full revelation of God's plan of salvation (the mystery of God, which affects every creature in the universe and ultimately vindicates the character of God).

For Seventh-day Adventists, who see Ellen White's comments on Scripture as authoritative, there are three principles to keep in mind in regard to the statement in COL 294: 1) She herself considered the biblical text the final authority, not her comments on it. 2) She made multiple comments on most biblical texts, some more exegetical than others. All should be taken into account before drawing a conclusion on her position. 3) Her understanding of the biblical text grew with time. So if what she says about the text seems to contradict the natural, exegetical meaning there are several possibilities: 1) She is right and the exegete is wrong and needs to look more carefully at the text. 2) Her comment is not intended to be exegetical and does not express the view of the Bible author's text. 3) There is a different comment that elaborates or comes closer to the text's meaning. She clearly has the scroll of Revelation 5 in mind in COL 294, but is not stating its identity and meaning. So a combination of 2) and 3) seems to be in play here. A further statement has more recently come to light.

There in His open hand lay the book, the roll of the history of God's providences, the prophetic history of nations and the church. Herein was contained the divine utterances, His authority, His commandments, His laws, the whole symbolic counsel of the Eternal, and the history of all ruling powers in the nations. In symbolic language was contained in that roll the influence of every nation, tongue, and people from the beginning of earth's history to its close. This roll was written within and without. John says: (Rev 5:4-5; 6:8-11; 8:1-4). Letter 65, 1898.

This statement is consistent with COL 294, but takes a much more comprehensive view of the scroll, one compatible with exegesis of the text.

That she describes the book *in* His open hand rather than at His right side is not surprising. She was not a Greek exegete. She accepted what was in the translation she was working with. She would not have wanted us to ignore Greek scholarship simply because she made an offhand comment about a detail in the text.

Rev 5:2B *And I saw a powerful angel* proclaiming with a *loud voice*. . . This powerful (Greek: *ischuron*) angel is echoed in chapter ten by *another powerful angel* (Rev 10:1). See comments on Rev 10:1. *Powerful* is sometimes translated *mighty* or *strong*. Since there is no such thing as a weak angel (Psa 103:20), this one must have been exceptional in power. Assuming that angels have some sort of hierarchy (a common assumption in ancient Judaism), this angel would have been one of the chief angels. In the time between the testaments, the four chief angels were called Gabriel, Michael, Raphael and Uriel. Since the name Gabriel means *God is my strong man*, (*gabar* means strong or mighty in Hebrew), it is possible that this is the angel Gabriel, though not named here.

The voice of this angel was loud enough for the whole creation to hear; the heaven, the earth and all that is under the earth. The strength of the angel is associated with the strength of its voice. The question raised by the angel is one of vast importance. In proclaiming a question of this size, the angel is admitting that in spite of being at the highest rank in the created universe, the question can only be answered by one even higher, by One above the creation.

Who is worthy to open the scroll, namely, to break its seals? = *Worthy* (Greek: *axios*) is the unique key word of the chapter. The word appeared for the first time in Revelation in 4:11, see comments on that verse. Unlike 4:11, the verb in *who is worthy?* is stated rather than understood (Greek: *Tis axios estin*). It is an adjective meaning *deserving*, *fitted for*, or *qualified*. To be worthy is to be judged able; physically, mentally or morally, to accomplish a task or an office.

In this case, mere physical strength is not in view, it is moral fitness that is in question. It is those who are pure in heart and willing to do God's will that are best fitted to understand and explain God (John 7:17; 14:30; Heb 2:9). How this particular worthy person would become qualified only becomes evident later in the chapter (Rev 5:6, 9-10). But the idea of worthiness is found already in relation to Jesus in the gospels. At the Jordan River, John the Baptist did not feel *worthy* (Greek: *axios*) to untie Jesus' sandal (John 1:27). The centurion of Capernaum did not feel *worthy* (a Greek synonym: *hikanos*) to have Jesus enter his house (Matt 8:8).

Who is worthy to open the scroll, namely, to break its seals? = The *and* between *scroll* and *break* in most English translations (Greek: *kai*) is epexegetical, meaning that what follows is the same thing as what comes before, but in different words. To break the seals is to open the scroll. Hence I have translated *namely* instead of simply *and*.

In New Testament times a statement or question about worthiness was often followed by a purpose clause (Greek: *hina* with subjunctive or a simple infinitive) indicating the purpose for which a person was qualified or deserving. In this verse the worthy question is followed by

two simple infinitives. Who is worthy *to open* (Greek: *anoixai*) the book and *to break* (Greek: *lusal*) its seals? The seals are not numbered in this verse, that there are still seven of them is assumed from the first verse. In this context it seems to me that the angel's cry is a challenge rather than an appeal. When the Lamb in verse six bears the evidence of the cross, there are no doubts as to His worthiness to take the scroll, break its seals and reveal the contents at the proper time.

Rev 5:3B *And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth **was able** to open the scroll or to look into it.* The main verb, *was able* (Greek: *edunato*), is not related to worthiness but to ability (root of the English word *dynamic*). This statement applies to the entire creation as expressed by the ancients; no one in or above the sky, on the earth or under the earth (realm of the underworld however a person understood that) had the ability to open the scroll, it had to be someone outside the creation, yet also someone other than God. This was a problem so large that it appeared not even God could solve it. Excluded from this ability are humans, angels, demons or any other creature. This triple division of the universe is first encountered in the literature of Babylon, but had become widely popular by New Testament times (see also Exod 20:4; Phil 2:10).

*And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth **was able** to open the scroll or to look into it.* This verse adds a strange element to the purposes for which the worthy one is being sought. No one is found to open the book or even *to see it* (Greek infinitive: *blepein auto*). This simple comment has been translated *to look thereon*, (KJV) *to look into it* (ESV, NASB, RSV, NRSV), or *look inside it* (NIV). All of these translations are somewhat speculative, adding something not explicitly said in the Greek, because a literal reading would imply that the whole universe is blind.

The bottom line is that John *saw the book* (Rev 5:1) that no one could see (5:3). So the meaning in this verse cannot be literal. More likely, the meaning is *see* in the sense of *understanding*. Only the worthy one can truly explain the contents of the scroll. Only he is qualified to both know what God knows and to experience all that it means to be human, even unto death. Only the worthy one is qualified to truly demonstrate what God is like.

*And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth **was able** to open the scroll or to look into it.* If the issue of the scroll is the character of God, it becomes clearer why not even the one sitting on the throne is able to open the book, break its seals or even *see it*. Nothing God does as God can fully convince the creation that God is not what Satan has made Him out to be. He is not arbitrary, selfish, deceptive, power-hungry or judgmental. God could simply claim to be the opposite of Satan's charges, but that would be His word against Satan's. It would have no persuasive power. People might come to agree because God is powerful, but they would not be convinced in heart. Only a demonstration of God's true character, in a form that the creation could understand, could have truly convincing power. This occurred at the cross. There the character of God, in contrast with the character of Satan, was fully exposed. Only the God-man, Jesus Christ, could provide convincing evidence that would persuade the whole universe. That demonstration was accepted by the onlooking universe in Revelation 5,

but remains to be proclaimed in convincing fashion on earth.

Rev 5:4B ^AAnd *I wept much* because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. [@] The word ^{AI} is normally taken for granted by the form of the Greek verb. The explicit use of ^{AI} here (Greek: *ego*) is emphatic; ^{AI} myself wept at this scene. [@] The Greek word for ^Aweeping [@] (*eklaion*) is an imperfect, which emphasizes its continuous nature. He was continually weeping a whole lot. Benson makes the comment on this text, ^AThe Revelation was not written without tears: neither without tears will it be understood. [@] Why John wept, of course, depends on the identity and meaning of the scroll (see Rev 5:1: Excursis on the Identity and Contents of the Sealed Scroll).

If, as suggested above, the identity and meaning of the scroll is the revelation of the mystery of God, it is potential lack of revelation that causes John to weep. The one thing we learn from this verse is that the lack of response to the powerful angel=s challenge in verse two has caused John to weep. Whatever the content of the scroll, John sees it as of extreme importance to himself and those he loves. The overall tone of the book of Revelation *is* revelation. The chance that a revelation may be thwarted is distressing to John.

Rev 5:4 (Spiritual Lesson) ^B Barnes has offered some powerful spiritual reflections on this scene. The behavior of John illustrates two things that often occur in people who want to understand the things of God. 1) People have a strong desire to know the future, to lift the veil that shrouds what is to come. Through dreams, astrology, the flight of birds and spiritualism, people have earnestly sought to know what is to come. The strong and usually futile desire to know the future is a strong driver behind earnest study of the book of Revelation. 2) The weeping of John illustrates the deep grief people often experience when every effort to know God or understand the future seems to have failed. The discovery of human limits often fills the heart with a deep sense of grief. All that human beings can arrive at by their own efforts is uncertain conjectures. At no point in human experience is this limitation more deeply felt than in the desire to know the future. God can use these desires and frustrations to drive people to invest in study of the Word. But the purpose of Revelation is not so much to satisfy our curiosity about the future, as to use that curiosity to teach us about Christ and how we can best live for Him today.

Rev 5:5B ^A And one of the elders said to me, [>]Do not weep, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has overcome to open the scroll and its seven seals. ^{=@} One of the twenty-four elders (introduced in Rev 4:4 and representing humanity before God ^B see Excursis to Rev 4:4 for a deeper analysis) approaches John to inform him that a worthy one has been found and the heavenly crisis is about to be resolved. There is no basis in the text for identifying just who this elder is, though some commentators have speculated that it might be Jacob (because of Gen 49:10), Peter or Matthew. Neither is any reason given why it would be an elder rather than an angel that discloses this information to John. Perhaps it is enough that they recognize John=s human frailty and in compassion one of them reaches out to him. The command not to weep is a present imperative, which implies ceasing what John has been continually doing. Weeping is

not appropriate when the solution is at hand.

ⒶThe Lion of the tribe of Judah.Ⓜ The Lion of the Tribe of Judah is Jesus Christ. He was descended physically from Judah (Heb 7:14), the fourth son of Jacob (Israel). He was the Messiah promised in Old Testament times (Gen 49:10). The association with the lion is based on Genesis 49:9 where Judah is called a Ⓐlion=s whelpⓂ by his father. A young lion was placed on the standard or flag of the tribe of Judah, which led Israel=s march through the desert during the Exodus. The lion is a symbol of strength, courage and rulership. The lion is the king of beasts and is thus an appropriate symbol of kingly authority. The Lion of Judah has the authority to break the seals of the scroll because He is the Messianic king in the line of Judah.

ⒶThe root of David.Ⓜ Another name for the Lion of Judah is Ⓐthe root of DavidⓂ (see also Isa 11:1, 10; Rom 15:12). A parallel concept is Ⓐthe seed of DavidⓂ (Rom 1:3). The worthy one is not only descended from Judah, but is the root or foundation of David. Historically, it was in the kingship of David that the conquering lion nature of Judah became manifest. In these two phrases together are implied the two natures of Christ, the human side, descended from a human forebear, and the divine side, the one who existed before David and established his throne (2 Sam 7:8-14). This same concept is expressed in another way in Rev 22:16, He is both the root and the offspring of David (see also Matt 22:42-45; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44). The ability to open the scroll means He is not only the rightful ruler in heavenly places, but the mediator of revelation regarding the character and government of God. The announcement in this verse is followed by the enthronement of the Lamb in heavenly places (Rev. 5:6-14). The Lamb=s right to the throne is established in the authority given to the line of David.

The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has **overcome**. . .Ⓜ The word for ⒶovercomeⓂ (Greek: *enikêsen*) is in the emphatic position (in Greek it comes before the subject (Lion of Judah and root of David), It is the key element of the sentence. The overcoming echoes Revelation 3:21 where Jesus says Ⓐas I overcameⓂ (Greek: *enikêsa*). The overcoming of Christ (aoristⓂ point in past time) is here clearly defined by the slain Lamb (Rev 5:6, 9, 12). The cross is the place where the Lamb overcomes.

The verb for overcoming is followed by an infinitive of purpose or result (Ⓐto open,Ⓜ Greek: *anoixai*). The opening of the scroll is not the victory that this verse is talking about, the victory itself is the cross. The ability to open the scroll is the consequence of the earlier victory on the cross. This is clarified in verse 9 where the Lamb is worthy to open the scroll because (Greek: *hoti*) he was slain. The power and authority gained at the cross is the power to reveal the truth about God.

Rev 5:6B ⒶAnd I saw, in the middle of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the middle of the elders. . .Ⓜ This part of the verse recalls in some detail the vision of chapter four. The throne was at the center of that vision, surrounded by the four living creatures, who may have been supports to the throne, and further surrounded by the twenty-four elders. There is no question as to the location of the Lamb when it appears. If the four living creatures are as closely associated with the throne as appears in chapter four, the Lamb can be nowhere else than in the center of the throne itself, the place where the One also resides. This verse, then, is

the counterpart of Revelation 3:21, where Jesus asserts, *“I also sat down with my Father on His throne.”* The sitting down of 3:21 and the arrival on the throne in 5:5-6 are the same event and in the past (3:21, *“I sat down,”* Greek: *ekathisa*; 5:5-6, *“I overcame, slaughtered,”* Greek: *enikêsen, esphagmenon*). The vision places the crucified Christ at the center of government in the universe.

“And I saw, in the middle of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the middle of the elders. . . .” Since the throne itself is not described in detail, it is hard to imagine exactly what *“in the midst of the throne”* actually means. If the scroll was at the right side of God, lying on the throne (as Stefanovic suggests), the Lamb in verse 6 has not yet picked it up. It was only after picking up the scroll that He became seated at the right hand of God. Most commentators, therefore, think that *“in the midst of the throne”* actually means that the Lamb at this moment is inside the ring of the elders, between the two nearer living creatures, and immediately in front of the throne. Revelation 5:6 is like a freeze frame, offering a visual description of the Lamb. It catches Him just as He is about to pick up the scroll (Rev 5:7) and take His rightful place on the throne to receive the worship and adulation of the heavenly throng (5:8-14).

“A Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered. . . .” It is important to observe that the Lion of verse five is the same person as the Lamb of verse six. Both are metaphors for the Christ of Revelation. But what is interesting here is that John never sees the Lion. He is told that the Lion of Judah has overcome, with the result that he is qualified to open the book by breaking its seals. But when he actually looks (Rev 5:6), he sees a Lamb standing as if slaughtered. What John sees and hears are opposites at face value, but they are the same person in actuality. This is a consistent literary pattern in the book of Revelation. In Rev 1:10 John hears the blast of a trumpet but never actually sees the trumpet. Instead, when he turns to look where the sound came from (1:12) he sees the glorious Christ (1:13-16) who then speaks with him (1:17-18). In Revelation 7, John hears the number of the 144,000 (7:4-8) but never actually sees them, he only hears a description. When he looks he sees a great multitude that no one can number (7:9-12). The two groups are opposites at first glance, but are two ways of describing the same end-time people of God. Revelation 5 establishes the pattern and its meaning throughout the book. The victory of the Lion/Lamb has two sides; it is grounded in great strength, yet that power is exercised with restraint, it is exercised in apparent weakness.

“A Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered. . . .” The term *“Lamb”* (Greek: *arnion*) is a diminutive form, as in *“a little lamb.”* This emphasizes the apparent weakness of the Lamb. In the words of Paul, *“God’s strength is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Cor 12:9). Use of *arnion* for lamb is unique to Revelation in the Bible except for the Greek version of Jeremiah 11:19, where Jeremiah complains that he was led like an innocent lamb (Greek: *arnion*) to the slaughter. The lamb appears as if its throat had been cut, yet he is not dead or dying, he is standing. This makes clear that, while He bears the visible marks of having been slaughtered, He is in fact alive (Rev 1:17-18). The royal authority of Jesus (Lion of Judah) is grounded in His death and resurrection. This would have led early Christian readers, no doubt, to have recalled the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:7. There are echoes also of the Passover lamb, whose blood spared the first-born of Israel during the Exodus (Exod. 12:21-27; John 1:29,36).

A Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, **having seven horns and seven eyes**. . .@
It is unusual for a lamb to have horns, so right away it is clear that this vision is stretching reality, at least on the surface. Nothing is said in this text regarding the location of the horns and eyes on the body of the Lamb. So we should not speculate on that, it is not material to the interpretation of the vision. The vision is not to be taken literally. Its meaning is in the symbols themselves. The number seven in Revelation is the number of perfection or completion. The seven horns on the Lamb are in contrast with the ten horns of the dragon, the sea beast and the beast of Revelation 17 (Rev 12:3; 13:1; 17:3).

Since horns symbolize religious or political power (Num 23:22; Deut. 33:17; 1 Sam 2:1; 1 Kings 22:11; Jer 48:25; Dan 7:7,20,24), the Lamb=s seven horns would represent omnipotence, complete and total power (Matt 28:18). But what startles the reader is that this super power is expressed by the weakness of the Lamb that was slain. In this picture we catch a glimpse of how God chooses to rule the universe. While He is infinitely powerful, that power is exercised through self-sacrificial love. The best way to explain this striking juxtaposition lies in the cosmic conflict motif that comes sharply into view in chapter twelve of Revelation (see multiple references throughout the comments on chapter twelve, and particularly on Rev 12:7-10).

At the original creation, a God of love populated the universe with creatures that were and continue to be truly free. But true love cannot exist in the absence of freedom. For love to be genuine, it must be free; free to love, but free also to reject love and rebel against the Lover. In Revelation twelve and other places (like Job 1-2, Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28), it becomes evident that a chief of the angels, named Lucifer originally (A light bearer@) but also known as the devil and Satan, exercised that freedom and began a rebellion in heaven, in which he attacked the character and government of God. He accused God of being selfish, manipulative, arbitrary, judgmental and severe. When God attempted to refute the charges, Satan accused God of being a liar (see examples of this in Genesis 3:1-6 and Job 1 and 2). In an atmosphere of freedom, these accusations became very difficult to refute (the very meaning of ASatan@ is Aadversary@ or Accuser@B see Revelation 12:10 in light of Zechariah 3:1-2), even for God. It was God=s word against Satan=s word. This issue lies behind the meaning of the sealed scroll in this chapter. Opening the scroll was something even God could not achieve on His own. It required the special qualifications of the Lamb, who combined the best qualities of both God and humans.

To combat this rebellion with the use of force would prove Satan=s charges correct. To ignore it would undermine the peace and security of the universe. God chose a third option, to slowly, painfully, provide evidence of two realities; the justice and graciousness of God=s form of government and the horrific consequences of the kind of government that Satan=s character would produce. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross is presented in Revelation 5:6 as the model of how God rules the universe, through self-sacrificing love. In the ministry of Jesus on earth, in the way that He died, God renounced all use of force and instead brought evidence that He was not the kind of person or ruler Satan had made him out to be. Rather than selfish, manipulative, arbitrary, judgmental and severe, He proved to be self-sacrificing, supportive, reasonable, gracious, merciful and forgiving. A back story like this is crucial for understanding the dynamic taking place in Revelation 5.

At first glance, Satan is totally absent from the vision described in Revelation four and five. But we noticed in relation to Revelation 4:8 that the *day and night*, in which the four living creatures constantly sang *holy, holy, holy*, anticipated the *day and night* of Satan's accusations in Revelation 12:10, part of the most crucial text in the Bible for the cosmic conflict motif. Now we see that the juxtaposition of the Lion of Judah with the Lamb that was slain also points to the ominous figure lurking in the shadows of the throne room scene. In the slain Lamb we see the answer to Satan's accusations against the character and government of God. While he has already been cast out of the throne room in heaven and his charges are no longer believed there (see comments on Rev 12:10), his position on the earth is a very different matter. There his charges against God have ruled with an iron hand, but in the life and death of Jesus, an anti-virus has been introduced into the system of earth. The true Messiah has come. And His rule is not what His people had expected; a bigger Bully than Rome. Instead He came like a Lamb led to the slaughter (Isa 53:7). This is the mighty power of God to tear down the strongholds of Satan (2 Cor 10:3-5). It is the power of truth, the power of love, the power of persuasion rather than force.

The seven eyes are drawn from the Old Testament (2 Chr 16:9; Zech 3:9; 4:10). They indicate divine watchfulness over all the earth. The Lord knows everything there is to know because His *eyes* roam to and fro across the earth, presumably covering all locations at the same time (omnipresence and omniscience combined). The power of the Lamb is exercised with eyes wide open.

For *seven spirits* elsewhere in Revelation see Rev 1:4; 3:1 and 4:5 and comments. In the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit is sent both by Jesus (John 15:26) and the Father (John 14:26). The term *sent* (Greek: *apostalmenoi*) comes from the same Greek word as *apostle* (Greek: *apostolos*). It is not clear from the grammar if the seven spirits are the seven eyes only or also represent the seven horns. In other words, are the seven horns and seven eyes two ways of saying the same thing? The word translated *which* is plural (Greek: *hoi*). But since both the horns and the eyes are multiple, that fact alone is indecisive. In this context it makes more sense for the *hoi* to refer just to the eyes. The seven horns represent the complete power of the Lamb and the seven eyes, His omnipresent wisdom through the working of the Spirit. The seven horns and the seven eyes both belong to the Lamb (*having* [Greek: *echôn*] seven horns and seven eyes), but only the seven eyes are the seven spirits. Christ knows everything that happens on the earth, because the Spirit goes throughout the earth. In short, verse six tells us that the Lamb has complete power and knowledge both.

The last phrase (*sent out into all the earth*) is a participial clause (Greek: *apestalmenoi*) defining the seven spirits. They are said to go out into all the earth. This language is a clear allusion to Zechariah 4:10. In this context it is an evident reference to the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, signifying the coming of the Spirit with power to the world. Elsewhere we have noted that the references to Exodus 19 and Ezekiel 1 are appropriate to the synagogue readings from the Law and the Prophets on the Day of Pentecost. This would point to the Day of Pentecost as the day when the Lamb was enthroned in heavenly places. If so, Pentecost is the starting point of the seven seals, in mid to late-spring, AD 31. See Rev 5:7 (Excursus on The Time of Rev 5) below.

Rev 5:7B And He came and took it from the right side of the one sitting on the throne. This verse is one evidence that visions are not to be taken literally most of the time. The image of a Lamb taking a scroll is hard to visualize, since lambs do not have fingers and thumbs. We must keep in mind that the vision of John was intended to be heard (Rev 1:3) rather than seen. It is the collective impact of the symbols heard that matters rather than the cumulative impact of seeing them. That is why artists have such a difficult time creating visuals from Revelation.

And He **came and took** it from the right side of the one sitting on the throne. The verb *came* (Greek: *êlthen*) is an aorist indicative and the verb *took* (Greek: *eilêphen*) is a perfect indicative, but both have the force of an aorist indicative, which is the most common usage in descriptions of a vision. *Took* (from the Greek *lambanô*) can also mean *receive*, a more passive implication. While the latter might seem more appropriate where God is involved, the active here heightens the glory of the Lamb in relation to all the created beings in the heavenly throne room. His victory (Rev 5:5) has made Him worthy to *take* the book, because He has every right to it. In Revelation 10:10 John also *takes* the book (Greek: *elabon*), but He is first invited to do so. The Lamb, on the other hand, takes the initiative on the basis of His prior victory at the cross (5:6). Regarding the right side of the one sitting on the throne, see notes on Rev 5:1.

Rev 5:7 (Excursis on The Time of Rev Five)B One question that has not yet been thoroughly addressed is the issue of when the Lamb took the book from the right side of the one sitting on the throne. The time when the Lamb takes the scroll is also the time when He begins to open it, unleashing the events of the seven seals. So the timing of this moment is crucial to the understanding of chapter six and to some degree also the seven trumpets. Do these events cover the span of Christian history, as SDAs have traditionally taught, or do they begin at some later point in history than the cross? It is clear that Revelation 5 speaks of a specific decisive event in the history of the universe--a crisis so great that not even God can solve it. Can we put a date on the point in history when this occurred? I believe we can.

In Revelation John practices a literary strategy I call *duodirectionality*. At decisive points in the book of Revelation there are passages that point both forward and backward at the same time. At the climax of a series of events in one vision John embeds the introduction and explanation of the vision that follows. An example of such a duodirectional text is Revelation 3:21: "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne." This text is the climax of seven overcomer promises in the seven churches of Revelation 2-3. But it is also the key to what follows in Revelation 4-7 and particularly the timing when the Lamb took the book in chapter five.

There four decisive elements in this verse (the first two parallel to the last two). The first two elements mentioned are the overcoming of members in the churches and their ultimate sitting down with Jesus on His throne. The second pair of elements in Revelation 3:21 tell us that Jesus overcame and sat down with His Father on His throne. Each of these four elements plays a major role in the seven seals vision, Revelation 4-7.

In Greek, the one who "overcomes" (Rev 3:21B Greek: *ho nikôn*) is a present participle, which is an extremely continuous construction in the Greek. So this phrase is addressing all readers of Revelation in the entire Christian era, overcoming is an activity that will continually be taking place. How are the readers of the book to overcome? "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." (Rev 12:11). So this phrase in Revelation 3:21 refers to the core gospel activity from John's day until the end. According to this verse, the primary task of Christians is *Overcoming*.

The next phrase in Revelation 3:21 indicates that the overcomers (all who respond to the gospel call of Revelation) will receive the right to sit with Jesus on His throne. This action is described in the future tense (*will give* B Greek: *dôsô*). When do the people of God receive a portion of Jesus' throne? As God's people overcome in the present, they will receive a reward in the future. The first half of Revelation 3:21 expresses a present reality that will lead to a future reality: "I will give the right to sit with me on my throne." When I add *the right* to my translation, it is not translating a specific Greek word, but an attempt to express in English the force of the Greek construction: A future tense (*will give* B Greek: *dôsô*) combined with a dative (literally *to him* B Greek: *autô*) and an infinitive (*to sit* B Greek *kathisai*). Literally the Greek is *will give to him to sit*. So the implication is that the overcomer is granted by Jesus the right to join Him on His throne at some future time (Rev 7:15-17).

The last two clauses of Revelation 3:21 relate to Jesus Himself and both are in the Greek aorist tense (*overcame* B Greek: *enikêsa*; *sat down* B Greek: *ekathisa*), which in this verse indicates a point in past time. According to these clauses, at some point in the past (from John's perspective) Jesus *overcame* and *sat down* with His Father on His throne. When did Jesus Christ overcome? When did He sit down? A Christian in the first century could have only one possible answer: He overcame at the cross and sat down with His Father at His ascension to heaven after the resurrection.

Time and again in the New Testament, these two events (the cross and the enthronement of Jesus) are described as decisive to the Christian story. On the one hand, the cross is seen as the center point of all Christian faith; on the other, there is the emphasis of Jesus sitting down at the right hand of His Father. The death and resurrection of Jesus are the foundation of Christian faith, the enthronement of Jesus in heavenly places enables Him to work mightily in behalf of His people on earth. These two events are at the core of the New Testament message.

The association of the death of Jesus Christ with His *Overcoming* in Revelation 3:21 is confirmed in Revelation 5. "Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals. Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth' (Rev 5:5-6, NIV).

The word "triumphed" in the NIV is the same as *overcame* in Revelation 3:21. The two words here are identical, even down to the aorist indicative tense (Rev 3:21B *enikêsa*; Rev

5:5B *enikêsen*). When Jesus said, "As I overcame" (Rev 3:21) He anticipated the words of the elder to John in Revelation 5, "The Lion of the tribe of Judah **has overcome**." The immediate context of the Lamb=s taking the scroll in 5:7 is His overcoming at the cross (5:5-6). The two events are exactly the same. The consequence of the cross in Revelation 3 and 5 is also the same, Jesus joins the Father on His throne (Rev 5:5-13). Revelation 3:21 is evidence enough that the Lamb=s taking of the scroll in Revelation 5 expresses His enthronement in heaven after the cross and His ascension to heaven. Further evidence will locate that time even more precisely.

Duodirectionality means that John has embedded the key to his next vision in the climax of the previous series. Revelation 3:21 is the climax of the seven overcomer promises given to the seven churches. Each of the seven promises is bigger than the previous. The church at Ephesus gets one promise. The church at Smyrna gets two promises, the sixth church, Philadelphia, gets six promises. The seventh church, Laodicea, gets the promise to end all promises, to sit with Jesus on His throne. But this is the very verse that offers the key to the vision that follows, the seven seals (Rev 4:1 - 8:1).

Revelation 3:21 contains the essence of Revelation 4-7 in advance: the Father's throne is seen in Revelation 4. Jesus joins the Father on His throne in Revelation 5. The overcoming and sitting down of Jesus (Rev 3:21c and d) are fulfilled in Revelation 4 and 5. Where do the overcomers join Jesus on His throne (Rev 3:21b)? Revelation 7, where the people of God join Jesus day and night, as a retinue that follow Him wherever He goes (Revelation 7:9-17). The one remaining element of Revelation 3:21 is the overcoming of God=s people (Rev 3:21a). The one remaining element of the seven seals is the content of chapter 6, where the seals are broken, triggering events on earth.

The relation of Revelation 3:21 with the seven seals tells us what Revelation 4-7 is all about, particularly chapter six. The overcoming of Jesus and His sitting down on the heavenly throne are what Revelation 4 and 5 are all about. Overcomers joining Jesus on His throne is what Revelation 7 (especially verses 15-17) is all about. The remaining pieces are "the one who overcomes" (Rev 3:21a) and chapter six. This makes clear what chapter six, one of the most difficult passages in all the Bible, is all about. It is about the process of overcoming from the time when the Lamb takes the book until the second coming of Jesus (Rev 6:15-17). Like Matthew 24, Revelation 6 is about the going forth of the gospel into the world, its acceptance and rejection and an accelerating polarization of good and evil in the world as history approaches the Second Coming. In spite of its difficult imagery, chapter six is Jesus-centered and gospel-oriented.

The principle of duodirectionality helps us to see that Revelation 3:21 holds the key to the seven seals. As difficult as the seals are, we now know that they are about the experience of the people of God through earthly history, struggling to overcome and experiencing opposition and many trials. Having established this, we are well on the way to understanding this passage. Revelation 6, rightly understood, is very much in harmony with the theology of the rest of the New Testament.

The principle of duodirectionality has shown that Revelation 3:21 is critical for the interpretation of the seven seals in general and the time of Revelation 5 in particular. If the overcoming of the Lamb (Rev 5:5; 3:21c) is the cross (Rev 5:5-12) and the taking of the scroll

includes enthronement (Rev 3:21d; 5:7), then the time of Revelation 5 is concerned with events that probably took place in 31 AD, events that the author of Revelation would be greatly familiar with.

This would underline the point that the Book of Revelation is a New Testament book, written in apocalyptic symbols, but grounded in the same theology and worldview as the rest of the New Testament. Revelation 5 is about when Jesus died on the cross and was elevated to heaven at His ascension to join His Father on the throne. The death of Jesus is the reason that Jesus can open the book and He is worthy because He overcame (Rev 5:9-13). From the standpoint of Revelation 3:21, it is clear that Jesus does not overcome and join His Father on the throne at some future time. These events have already taken place in John's past. I would conclude, therefore, that the most natural reading of Revelation 5 has to do with the events of 31 A.D. This has powerful implications for Revelation 6, as we will see.

It is important to remember that the Book of Revelation is a New Testament book. Its basic theology, therefore, will not be fundamentally different from the theology one finds in the rest of the New Testament. Reading Revelation 5 as the enthronement of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary connects the chapter with a common New Testament theme: "The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man" (Hebrews 8:1-2).

This text describes Jesus as a high priest who "sat down" (Greek: *ekathisen*) at the right hand of the throne. This is the same word, in the same tense, as the one in Revelation 3:21 (Greek: *ekathisa*). Jesus ascended to heaven (see Acts 1:9-11) and sat down on the right hand of God, assuming the authority of a king. Now, he serves (present tense) in the heavenly sanctuary set up by the Lord. This parallels what we are seeing in Revelation 5. The enthronement of Jesus is the decisive event that makes everything else in Revelation possible--Christ's intercession, the great judgment scenes, and Christ's entire ministry to His people. The enthronement of Jesus at the right hand of the Father is a common theme in the New Testament (Matt 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; 14:62; Luke 10:42; 22:69; Acts 2:33-34; 5:31; 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3,13; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22).

Elsewhere in the New Testament, particularly in Acts 2 (verses 33-34), the enthronement of Jesus takes place on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after Passover. That was the day when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples and 3000 were baptized in Jerusalem. What evidence is there that the event of Revelation 5 is also associated with Pentecost?

One important piece of evidence is the note in Revelation 5:6 that the seven spirits of God have been sent out (perfect participleB Greek: *apestalmenoi*) into all the earth. Interestingly, here is one place of significant difference with the traditional Greek text (consensus of the Middle Ages) which has a present participle (Greek: *apostellomena*) instead of the perfect. Either reading fits the setting of the day of Pentecost and the King James translation (reflecting the traditional Greek text) is essentially the same as more modern translations (that reflect the earlier Greek text). In the context of Jesus' enthronement in heaven, the Spirit of God is sent out into all the earth. But there is even more evidence to

support the connection of Revelation 4-5 with Pentecost.

The first Pentecost took place fifty days after the first Passover (Exod 23:16; Deut 16:9) during the time when the law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 19-20). The Israelites arrived at Sinai on the new moon of the third month (first day of the month) and the law was given a few days after, probably on the Sabbath, according to Jewish tradition. Originally it was a harvest festival (Exod 23:16; Num 28:26), but later in Jewish interpretation it came to be associated with the giving of the law on Mount Sinai.

Two of the key background texts to Revelation 4 and 5 are Exodus 19 and Ezekiel 1. In the first century, these two chapters were the readings in the synagogue for the day of Pentecost, Exodus 19 from the Torah and Ezekiel 19 from the prophets. Exodus 19 portrayed the inauguration of Israel as the people of God (Exod 19:5-6), Rev 5:9-10 portrays the same for New Testament Israel. So in terms of the festal calendar of ancient Israel, the day of Pentecost is the best parallel to the vision of Revelation 4-5. This is further evidence that the time of Revelation 5 is describing Pentecost from a cosmic perspective, AD 31.

Further evidence that the time of Revelation 5 is at the beginning of the Christian era rather than its end can be found in the structure of Revelation. The book is structured as a chiasm (the earlier chapters are parallel to the later chapters and the structure moves in stair-step or pyramid fashion toward the center of the book). Dr. Kenneth Strand, who developed that idea, noted that the first half of the book focuses on the realities of the whole Christian age while the material in the second half focuses on the very events surrounding the end of time.

If the seals' focus on the entire Christian age, their beginning point should be at the beginning of that age. That beginning point is the time when the Lamb takes the book from the one sitting on the throne. Dating that event at Pentecost in A.D. 31, which we have seen from other evidence, is entirely compatible with the vision's location in the structure of the whole book.

The difference between the two halves of Revelation can be supported with specific details. First of all, compare the worship scenes of Revelation 4-5 with Revelation 19 (its chiastic counterpart at the end) and notice the similarities between the two passages. They each contain twenty-four elders, four living creatures, mentions of the throne, praise, and worship. In Revelation 19, God is praised for destroying end-time Babylon. In Revelation 4-5, God is praised for creation (4:11) and for redemption at the cross (5:9,10,12,13), events in the past from John's perspective. However, while Revelation 4-5 describes the beginning of the Christian era, Revelation 7 ends with God's people coming out of the great tribulation praising God for their deliverance. This is at the same end-time point in history as the scene in Revelation 19. So the seven seals (chapters four through seven) cover the entire Christian era. The latter part of Revelation (chapters twelve through twenty-two, focus particularly on the events of the end-time. This is further evidence that Revelation 5 reflects the beginning and not the end of the Christian era.

Another detail that supports chapter 19 being the chiastic parallel to chapter six is the rider on the white horse theme. The white horse of Revelation 6:2 is parallel to the white horse of Revelation 19:11. The riders on both horses wear crowns. There is a victory crown (Greek: *stephanos* like an olympic gold medal) in the first seal and a royal crown of rulership (Greek:

diadêma) in chapter 19. Jesus is repeatedly talked about in Revelation as the one who overcomes. The one who overcomes will receive the crown of victory. This crown is appropriate to the situation of the first seal, if it represents a reality at the beginning of the Christian age. On the other hand, in chapter 19 Jesus is seen putting an end to all opposition on the earth, so the crown of royalty is appropriate there. This is another detail of comparison that supports the overall shape of Revelation as a chiasm. The seals are part of the historical half of Revelation and chapter 19 is part of the eschatological half of Revelation.

The most impressive single parallel between Revelation 6 and Revelation 19 concerns the fifth seal, the *Àsouls under the altar@* passage. The cry of these souls is literally *ÀHow long will you be **not judging and avenging@*** (Greek: *ou krineis kia ekdikeis*)? Both verbs (judging and avenging) are present indicatives. The souls are asserting that God=s judgment and vengeance concerning the crimes they have been subjected to has not yet begun. This is the first time that a Greek word for judgment has appeared in the book and it appears in order to say that judgment has not yet begun with the arrival of the fifth seal.

In itself, this clearly demonstrates that the foundation scene of Revelation 5 is not an end-time judgment scene. Revelation 5 comes before the breaking of any of the seals. With the breaking of the fifth seal, end-time judgment has not yet begun. In Revelation the Greek language for judgment is reserved for the end-time of earth=s history and that language does not apply to Revelation 5 or the first five seals. But that situation clearly changes when you compare the fifth seal with Revelation 19.

When you compare Revelation 6:10 with its chiastic counterpart (Rev 19:1-2) you find a fascinating parallel. There are some seven or eight Greek words in parallel between the fifth seal and chapter 19. Particularly notable is the use of the words *Àjudge@* and *Àavenge.@* As already noted above, in the fifth seal God is seen as *Ànot judging@* (Greek: *ou krineis*) and *Ànot avenging@* (Greek: *ou . . . ekdikeis*). But in Revelation 19:2 comes the triumphant declaration that God *Àhas judged@* (Greek: *ekrinen*) and *Àhas avenged@* (Greek: *exedikêsen*) the blood of His servants in the destruction of Babylon. At the time of the fifth seal, end-time judgment and vengeance has not yet begun, at the time of Revelation 19 that judgment and vengeance has been completed upon end-time Babylon. This clarifies the relative historical position of chapters 6 and 19 within the book. The fifth seal lies somewhere between the New Testament Pentecost (Rev 5:6) and the Second Coming of Jesus (Rev 6:15-17), but before the final judgment. Revelation 19 lies at the very end of that period, between the close of judgment and the Second Coming itself.

The fifth seal describes a point in history when the Lamb=s taking of the book and the breaking of four seals are in the past, but the heavenly signs and events of the End are still in the future. Final judgment has not yet begun, but in another sense has begun. The souls under the altar are granted white robes while they wait for vindication. This sounds like the verdict of the investigative judgment, or what Adventists have called the judgment of the dead. In Adventist pioneer thought, that judgment began in heaven in 1844 with names of those who died professing Christ being examined.

What is the point of an investigative judgment when God is at least as all-knowing as a bank, which can produce the current or final standing of every customer with the mere strike of

a key. The investigative judgment is not in order that God will know how to reward each person, but for the sake of the onlooking universe. It is part of cosmic conflict over the character of God between Christ and Satan. Satan has accused God of being arbitrary, severe, judgmental and unforgiving (the qualities of his own character). God does not refute the charges with mere claims, but lays open the evidence before the onlooking universe. God opens the books so that all can be persuaded of His true character and also the character of those who will be welcomed into eternity. The souls under the altar of Revelation 6:9-11 are the first fruits of redeemed humanity. While their resurrection remains in the future, they are vindicated in the judgment alluded to in the fifth seal.

While the seven seals cover the whole of Christian history, that includes a summary of the events of the end-time (Rev 6:12-17). While the seven seals begin with the taking of the book in AD 31, they conclude with the second coming (6:15-17) and beyond (8:1). The end-time climax of the sixth seal is also parallel to chapter 19, but now at the same point in history. Note this parallel:

"And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, 'Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.'" Revelation 19:17-18.

There are many parallels between Revelation 6:15-17 (moving toward the end-time) and Revelation 19:17-18 (end-time) and they are both referring to the same event. The seven seals cover the whole Christian era, including the events of the End.

We have seen the evidence of the chiastic structure. The early part of the book of Revelation, of which the seven seals are a part, cover the entire Christian age. The events in the latter part of the book, on the other hand, focus on the final days of earth's history in particular. This is a second line of evidence that shows that the taking of the book by the Lamb in Revelation 5 must have occurred at the beginning of the Christian era.

There is a third line of evidence for the time of Revelation 5, the sanctuary background of the imagery in the book of Revelation. The first half of the book of Revelation is based on the "tamid" the daily service in the sanctuary/temple. The daily service involved a number of features, according to the *Mishnah*, a compendium of rabbinical tradition from the first and second centuries of the common era. I will list each feature along with the text in Revelation that alludes to it. A priest entered the Holy Place to trim the lamps (1:13,20), then left the door of the temple open (4:1). There was the slaying of a lamb (5:6) and the pouring out of its blood at the base of the Altar of Burnt Offering (6:9). A priest then took coals from the altar in a censer or firepan and ministered the incense at the golden Altar of Incense (8:3-4). While doing this there was silence in the courtyard for about a half hour (8:1). At the conclusion of the service seven trumpets were blown and the censer was thrown down onto the floor of the outer court, signaling the end of the service (8:5-6).

The daily service is associated with intercession. From a Christian perspective, the incense represented the imputed righteousness of Christ over the wilderness sanctuary and throughout the whole Christian era. The intercession of Jesus began at the time of His ascension to heaven and continues all the way through the Christian era to the end. This

supports the idea that the first half of the book of Revelation covers the whole Christian era. That fact would also support putting Revelation 5 at the beginning of the Christian era.

The book of Revelation also seems to be based on the feasts of the Jewish liturgical year. The spring feasts (Passover, Unleavened Bread and Pentecost) found their Christian fulfillment in the first century (Lord's supper, cross, resurrection, Pentecost). Passover and Pentecost are associated with the first part of Revelation. Passover is fulfilled at the cross and alluded to in the seven church letters. Pentecost lies behind the material in Revelation 4 and 5 and is associated with Jesus' enthronement. As we have seen, the very day that Jesus was enthroned was the Day of Pentecost (Rev 5:6). On the day that Jesus joined His Father on the throne, the Holy Spirit was sent out into all the earth. On that same Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on Jesus' earthly followers. That is further support for dating the time when Jesus took the book as A.D. 31.

Revelation 5, therefore, describes the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary. When the writer of Hebrews wrote his book, the heavenly sanctuary was already in operation. So if it was already in operation when Hebrews was written, when did those services begin? That narrative is more clearly outlined in the book of Hebrews. According to Hebrews, as a result of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection He ascends to heaven and enters within the veil, establishing Himself at the right hand of the throne of God. At His ascension, He becomes a minister in the heavenly sanctuary. The ascension occurred shortly before Pentecost, probably in the year 31 A. D. Supporting that conclusion is the fact that almost every aspect of the sanctuary (lamps, laver, incense, horns, cherubim, the high priest's breastplate, etc.) is mentioned in Revelation 4 and 5. There are only two great sanctuary events in which every part of the sanctuary was included: the Inauguration and the Day of Atonement. But we can rule out the Day of Atonement option for Revelation 4-5, as we will see below.

There are a number of reasons in the text to rule out the Day of Atonement as the primary sanctuary reference in Revelation 4 and 5. First of all, the primary piece of furniture associated with the Day of Atonement is the ark of the covenant. John clearly knows about the ark because he mentions it in Revelation 11:19. But he makes no mention of the ark in Revelation 4 and 5.

Furthermore, in the Old Testament and in Judaism, the ark is associated with judgment. John knows about judgment and uses the language of judgment (Greek: *krisis*, *krima*, *krinô*) more than twelve times in the book of Revelation. But, there is no judgment language in Revelation 4-5-- that language is reserved in Revelation for clear end-time settings, particularly in the second half of the book of Revelation. End-time judgment is not in focus in Revelation 5, but intercession IS in focus, the elders are holding bowls of incense which are the prayers of the saints. As we have noticed, even at the time of the fifth seal, much later than Revelation 5, judgment has not yet begun. The only appearance of judgment language in the first half of the book is "How long will You be NOT judging?" (Revelation 6:10). The absence of the ark and the language of judgment rules out the Day of Atonement as the focus of Revelation 5.

In addition to the above, we would expect the language of the Most Holy Place (Greek: *naos*) to be used if the vision of Revelation 4 and 5 were representing the Day of Atonement. John often (about a dozen times) uses this term in reference to the heavenly temple,

particularly the inner-sanctuary (Rev 11:19). But that language is found only in the second half of the book and is totally absent from Revelation 4-5. This is appropriate if the first half of Revelation focuses on the whole Christian age while the latter half focuses on eschatological events.

If this vision were the Day of Atonement we would also expect a male goat instead of a Lamb as the central figure. The Lamb is appropriate to the Inauguration and the daily service but is not distinctive of the Day of Atonement. The preponderance of evidence points to the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary as the focus of the vision, not the Day of Atonement. That inauguration took place at the beginning of the Christian era.

How would a person approach Revelation 5 if he or she was living in the First Century? The obvious answer is that they would approach this vision as a reality already present in the First Century! God meets people where they are. God gave John this revelation in his own time, place, and circumstances, and the whole book needs to be read with that in mind. That doesn't mean that the book of Revelation cannot talk about the end-time. When the author wants to put you in the end-time, he has no difficulty doing so (Rev 6:12-17; 7; 11:15-18; 21-22). But we are not dealing with the language of the end-time in Revelation 5.

The key theological concepts in Revelation 5 are those that apply to the first century in the New Testament. For example, the cross of Christ is the towering reality of the New Testament and is mentioned in nearly every book. Christ's exaltation to the heavenly throne room is a past event in the New Testament; our inauguration as kings and priests had already taken place when John wrote the book (1 Peter 2:9-10); the incense representing the prayers of the saints is also appropriate in the first century. All these are consistent with what we observe in Revelation 5. Nothing is inappropriate to the first century (or requires us to think that the Lamb's taking of the book happened long after the first century). We should not place the text at a later time. The one piece of chapter five that could be interpreted as end-time is verse 13 where every creature in the universe praises God and the Lamb. But there is no hint here that Satan and his angels are included in this praise, which would only be appropriate, if at all, after the millennium. The verse expresses praise from all who at that time recognize the enthronement of the Lamb.

The parallel with the synoptic apocalypse (Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21) in Revelation 6 is the final line of evidence for placing Revelation 4-7 where we have it. In the Synoptic Apocalypse Jesus divides history into three great eras: the Christian era as a whole, a time of great persecution toward the end of that era, and then events surrounding the coming of Jesus himself.

First of all, notice the general realities that are typical of the whole Christian age (preaching the gospel, wars, rumors of wars, insurrections and rebellions, famines, pestilence, earthquakes). Jesus is explicit to say that they are not signs of the end but will continue to the end and are signs of the whole age (Matthew 24:6-8). Secondly, Jesus talks about a special time of tribulation when God's people suffer the *Times of the Gentiles* (Luke 21:24). Thirdly, Jesus moves to the end-time with its heavenly signs and other spectacular events (Luke 21:25-28).

This pattern is followed in Revelation 6. The first four seals resemble the general realities of the Christian age (preaching of the gospel, war, famine, pestilence, wild beasts, etc).

Then comes a focus on persecution (the souls under the altar crying out "How long?") and the chapter climaxes with heavenly signs and the kind of events directly associated with the end. Since the event of Revelation 5 precedes the parallels in chapter six, it must be an event right at the beginning of the Christian era.

In conclusion, the foundational event on which the interpretation of the seals is based took place in the First Century, in the same year in which Jesus died and rose again (A.D. 31), ascended to heaven, sat down on the throne in the heavenly sanctuary, and established His heavenly ministry for His people on earth. We have demonstrated that through a number of lines of evidence.

1- Immediate context. The relationship of Revelation 5 with Revelation 3:21 points to the cross and the enthronement as the focus.

2- Chiastic context. Revelation 5 fits in to the great chiastic structure of Revelation, introducing a sequence (seven seals) that covers the entire Christian age.

3- Sanctuary background. Evidences point to the Inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary and the day of Pentecost as the time when the Lamb takes the scroll and begins to break its seals. This is at the beginning of the Christian era, not some later time.

4- Contemporary setting. Everything that happened in Revelation 5 is appropriate to the first century setting of the book.

5- New Testament background. Jesus' synoptic apocalypse covers the same themes as chapter six, and these events take place over the whole Christian age.

The Bible says that two or three witnesses will establish something with certainty. Our five lines of evidence all point to the time when Jesus ascended to heaven and was enthroned at the right side of God as the time of Revelation 5. The breaking of the seals, then, cover the whole Christian age from Pentecost through the Second Coming of Jesus. Chapter six concerns the overcoming of God's people on this earth from the time that Jesus died, rose, ascended, and began ministering in heaven until He comes again.

This may seem to have been way too much effort to determine just when the Lamb took the book. And certainly the original readers might think what we have done here should be obvious. But for us at this stage of history, the seals are one of the most difficult passages in the entire book of Revelation. When we carry out careful exegetical method, examine the texts closely, and let the text and its meaning soak in, we discover that as difficult as the passage is, multiple lines of evidence point us to some clarity regarding the author's intention.

Rev 5:8B ἈAnd when He had taken the scroll@ refers back to the action of the Lamb in verse seven. The aorist indicative of Ἀtaken@ (Greek: *elaben*) makes clear that the action described here is now in the past. In verse seven the same word is in the perfect tense (Greek: *eilêphen*). The aorist indicates that the praise of verse nine and ten follows immediately upon the Lamb taking the book. The sequence of this verse reminds the reader of 4:9, where the praise of the elders is triggered by the praise of the four living creatures. Here the praise of both groups is triggered by the Lamb's taking of the scroll.

ἈAnd when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. . .@ The word translated Ἀfell down@ (Greek: *epesan*) is one of the

two main Greek words for worship (the other is *proskuneô* see also 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4). The capstone of ancient worship is falling down on one's face (1 Cor 14:25), much as Muslims do still today.

The first song in this vision (Rev 4:8) was sung by the four living creatures. The second song (Rev 4:11) was sung by the twenty-four elders. The third song (Rev 5:9-10) is sung by the four living creatures AND the twenty-four elders. This sequence signals a crescendo in which each song gets louder and louder. There is a sense that the sequence of hymns is leading somewhere. That "somewhere" is the universal acclamation of the fifth song (Rev 5:13). The climax of the sequence is worship of both the one sitting on the throne and the Lamb. For those early Christian readers who may have had doubts, Jesus Christ is here included in the one God that Judaism had always worshipped. In the Old Testament, only Yahweh is worthy of worship. Worship of anyone or anything else is idolatry. But here worship of Christ is seen as the natural consequence of His unique role in the plan of salvation and the healing of the universe.

"Each of them having a harp. . ." The word translated "each" (Greek: *ekastos*) is masculine, as are the twenty-four elders. The four living creatures are grammatically neuter. It is the elders alone, therefore, who have harps and who hold bowls of incense that represent the prayers of the saints. If the elders are representatives in heaven of redeemed humanity (see Excursus on Rev 4:4), it makes sense that they would be the ones in the heavenly chorus to represent the prayers of the saints before God.

Each elder carried a harp (Greek: *kitharas*), with which they accompanied the song that immediately follows. The translations are fairly consistent in calling the instrument a harp, but it was probably more like a guitar today than what we call a harp. The ancient instrument was triangular in shape, with seven to eleven strings and was played with a plectrum, a small piece of ivory. This was the chief instrument for expressing thanksgiving in the temple services (1 Chr 13:8; 2 Chr 5:12; Neh 12:27; Psa 33:2).

"And golden bowls filled with incense. . ." The bowls mentioned here (Greek: *phialas*) are of the shallow variety, much like saucers. These are often associated with the sanctuary and the temple in the Old Testament (Exod 27:3; 38:23; Num 4:14; 1 Kings 7:26, 31). They would be used for burning incense (Exod 30:1-10). The main difference between these bowls and censers (Rev 8:3 Greek: *libanôtos*) is that the ancient censer had a handle and is, therefore, sometimes translated as a "firepan." But the distinction between the two throughout the Greek Bible is very small, the words are often used interchangeably. For the meaning of "incense" please see the notes on Rev 8:3-4.

It is hard to visualize someone playing a harp (or a guitar) while also holding a bowl of incense. This fact should warn us against taking the visions of Revelation too literally or even too visually. The visions of Revelation were intended to be read more than seen.

The combination of prayer with incense is consistent with Old Testament usage (Psa 141:2): "Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (see also Lev 16:12-13)! In the temple context, while the priest was offering incense inside the temple, the people outside were in prayer before God (see Luke 1:9-10). Likewise here, the elders, representatives of humanity, offer incense in the heavenly throne room while the church on earth is engaged in prayer. The inhabitants of heaven, however, are

not seen in prayer, instead they offer praise and adoration directly to God. It is only those on earth who offer their praise to God in the form of prayer. Incense here represents the heartfelt prayers of God=s people, it is quality rather than quantity that counts (see also comments on Rev 8:3). While those on earth pray, incense wafts upward in heaven, signaling that the prayers are heard there and are acceptable to God. Just as incense naturally rises, so do the prayers of God=s people rise up to the throne.

While associating incense with prayers is common in the Bible, the grammar in this verse is a bit odd. The golden bowls are feminine in the Greek and incense is neuter. But the relative pronoun, *which*, is feminine, which would refer back to the bowls rather than the incense. Thus the bowls would represent the prayers of the saints rather than the incense. But since *bowls* do not represent prayers in the Bible the way incense does, the simple way out is to assume that this is a grammatical slip on John=s part, something that is quite common elsewhere in the book.

Incense in the temple was made with a very special blend that was not to be used for any other than a spiritual purpose (Exod 30:37-38). This suggests that prayer is also a unique activity, not intended for any other than a spiritual use.

The *Asaints* here are not to be confused with the twenty-four elders, not are they to be understood as virtuous but dead humans who have ascended to heaven and intercede there before God. *ASaints*, in the New Testament, is consistently a reference to living believers on earth, it is essentially equivalent to the church (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2; Heb 13:24; Rev 8:3-4; 11:18; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6, etc.). God=s people are accounted to be *Aholy* (same word in Greek as *Asaints*) on the basis of their trust in Jesus Christ.

Rev 5:9B *And they sing a new song. . .* There have already been two songs sung in the course of this vision (Rev 4:8, 11). And that is to be expected. Songs of praise have always been sung in heaven. But the song in this verse is specifically called a *Anew* song, so there must be something different about this song. It is new in kind (Greek: *kainên*, from *kainos*) rather than recent in time (Greek: *neos*). While the new song here is sung by the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, in Revelation 14:3 it is the 144,000 only that can sing the new song. The song in Revelation 14 must be different from this one, as it relates to the experience of the 144,000 in being redeemed from the earth. See comments on Rev 14:3. Both of these are songs that never would have been sung had not sin entered into the universe, infected the human race, and caused Christ to die.

And they sing a new song. . . The concept of a new song also echos Psalm 144:9. There it is in the context of battle. David sings a new song that celebrates the victory God provided over his enemies. That suggests that this new song is related to the victory of the slain Lamb (Rev 5:5-6). Military language is frequently used in Revelation for spiritual victories (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, etc.). Supporting this connection, the reference to the slain Lamb triggers the content of both this song (5:9-10) and the next (5:12). As we have seen in chapter four, the worship in heaven is unceasing, but a new song occurs in the context of the Lamb=s work of redemption. In Old Testament times the people of God=s creation lived in hope, but now the

actual redemption has come.

And they sing a **new song**. . . The verb for Asing@ (Greek: *adousin*) is a present indicative. Most translators use Asang@ or Asung@ instead, treating the verb as a historical present. If so, this parallels Revelation 5:5 (Asaid to me@B Greek: *legei*), but is the reverse of the usual visionary pattern, which tends to use aorist indicative (a point in past time) for describing what the visionary is currently experiencing (as in Rev 5:1-2, 6-8). At the time John is writing the vision, the seeing is already past. But in this case he reverses the tense to indicate two things, possibly. First, the song is continuous into the present even though it began in the reader=s past. Second, as John records this part of his vision, he is seeing it anew, he describes it as if it were even now taking place.

And they sang a new song, saying, >**You are worthy** to take the book and to open its seals. . . =@ The word Aworthy@ here (Greek: *axios*) is the last of four occurrences in the vision of Revelation 4 and 5. In Revelation 4:11 the one sitting on the throne is worthy because He created all things. In 5:2 the question is raised as to who might be worthy to break the seals and open the scroll. In 5:4 it is stated that no one was found worthy to do so. But in 5:5 one of the elders assures John that the Lion of Judah Ahas overcome@ (Greek: *enikêsen*), enabling Him to open the scroll and its seven seals. The word Aworthy@ itself is not repeated in 5:5-6, but is brought back here in verse 9. The reference to the Lamb being slain assures the reader that the term Aworthy@ is applied to the Lamb on account of His victory on the cross. The opening of the book and the cross are intimately related. Because of His death, He has the right to go where no one else can go and do what no one else can do.

You are worthy. . . because you were **slain**. . . The word for Aslain@ (Greek: *esphagês*) can be translated Aslaughter@ (Rev 13:3, 8) or Amurder@ (1 John 3:12; Rev 18:24). It also has sacrificial overtones (Lev 4:4, 24, 33, etc.). So it is an appropriate word to use with reference to the cross, which combined murder and sacrifice. It is the first of three verbs (the other two are Apurchased@ [5:9B Greek: *êgorasas*] and Amade@ [5:10B Greek: *epoiêsas*]) that indicate why the Lamb is considered worthy to open the scroll. All three verbs are in the aorist indicative, which means that they are describing something that occurred at a point in the past. The Aslain@ is clearly a reference to the one-time act of God at the cross. That would also be the time of the Apurchase.@ When we get to verse ten, we will explore the timing and meaning of making a kingdom and priests. By means of the cross, Christ has performed a work that no one else could do.

You are worthy to take the book and to open its seals, because you were slain and **purchased** for God with your blood. . . The word for Apurchase@ (Greek: *agorazo*) can also be translated Aransom@ (ESV, NRSV, RSV) or Aredeemed@ (KJV). I have chosen to use the word Apurchase@ (NASB, NIV), because it is the broader meaning of the word, with ransom or redemption being a particular sub-category of the larger concept. The translation Aransom@ would be most convincing in a context where one is ransomed from slavery or captivity, but that language does not appear in chapter five. While the concept of ransom or redemption is rooted in the Exodus, a major background for Revelation, a different, more specific word is used in the LXX (Greek: *lutroô*B Exod 15:13; Deut 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 21:8) to express that

concept. If John had wished to express the concept of ransom here, he could have made that clear by choosing the more specific Greek word.

¶You are worthy to take the book and to open its seals, because you were slain and **purchased for God with your blood**. . . ¶ The fact that the Lamb made this ¶purchase¶ with His blood indicates that the cross is the place of both the slaying and the purchase. In this particular metaphor, the blood is the price that makes the purchase possible. That purchase was a one time act in the past, taking place at the cross. It is the act of purchase that results in a new status for those who are in Christ, they are made to be a kingdom and priests. That result is ratified by the enthronement of the Lamb and His worthiness to open the scroll.

¶Purchased for God. . . people **from every tribe and language and people and nation**. . . ¶ The word translated ¶from¶ (Greek: *ek*) is a Greek preposition followed by four nouns in the genitive case. A similar use of *ek* is translated ¶of¶ in Matthew 25:8, Acts 2:17 and 1 John 4:13. The clause is a partitive genitive, meaning that a portion of the people in all four entities that follow were purchased for God. Similar four-fold listings of the people in the world are found throughout Revelation (see, for example, Rev 10:11; 14:7) although the items in each list and their order changes from text to text in Revelation.

The number four represents worldwide extension or universality, as in the four corners of the earth (Rev 7:1). These four elements, therefore, are truly intended to sum up all the people in the world. The text portrays an undivided people of God that is drawn from all the divisions of humanity, not just all nations, but even the smaller sub-divisions of nations. This vision can only be fully fulfilled when the gospel goes to the entire world in the last days (Matt 24:14; Rev 14:6).

In the ancient context each of these four designations would be thought of as larger than the previous. There is a sense of crescendo in this list. The terms ¶tribe¶ and ¶people¶ are usually restricted to Israel or the church in Scripture. The terms ¶tongue¶ and ¶nation¶ usually refer to the Gentiles. So the church is made up of both Jews and Gentiles.

Rev 5:10B ¶And you have **made** them to our God a kingdom and priests. . . ¶ ¶Made¶ (Greek: *epoiêsas*) is the third of three verbs that explain the basis upon which Lamb is considered to be worthy to take the scroll and open its seals. The first two verbs (¶slain¶ and ¶purchased¶) occurred in the context of the cross. If the meaning of making kings and priests here is collective and vicarious, it would also have occurred in the death and resurrection of Jesus. But if intended in the more practical, everyday sense, the new status invoked here is bestowed upon each believer at the point of conversion. The believers in view are those taken from every sub-division of humanity in verse nine.

In the Greek Old Testament, the word for ¶made¶ (Greek: *poieô*) is one of the major words for creation in Genesis 1. It is a consistent theme in the New Testament that the creative power of God, which made the physical world in the beginning, also creates new life in the lives of those who put their trust in Jesus. Here that creative power delivers a new status to the same believers.

¶And you have made them to our God a **kingdom and priests**. . . ¶ In the ancient world, kings had the highest status in the political realm and priests had the highest status in the

religious realm. To those who sacrificed much to embrace the gospel is the assurance that in the place where it matters most, they are considered to have the highest level status in Jesus Christ. In a related sense, Paul encourages Christians to offer their bodies as living sacrifices to God, offering Him acceptable worship (Rom 12:1-2, see also 1 Pet 2:5). In 1 Peter 2:9 it talks about a *royal priesthood*,¹ putting the two concepts into one. These New Testament references point back to Exodus 19:5-6, where Israel is called a *kingdom of priests*.² Israel was not called for its own sake, but to be a blessing to the nations, in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. The New Testament writers understand Jesus to be a new Israel, with the twelve disciples taking on the role of the leaders of the twelve tribes (see Matt 19:28-30). Israel is thus no longer constituted on the basis of physical descent from Jacob, but in relation to the Jewish Messiah Jesus. Thus Israel is expanded beyond the ethnic and geographical boundaries of ancient Israel to include Gentiles from every corner of the world.

*They will reign on the earth.*³ This kingdom and reign are the outcome of Christ's work. They are not earned by human performance. Through the cross of Christ, the power of His resurrection is made available to all who trust in Him. Two significant early manuscripts, A and B, have the present tense here, but textual scholars prefer the future. If the present tense were original, it would emphasize the present reality of genuine Christian faith to lead the world into a clearer picture of God and a deeper reality of humility and grace. This kind of *rule*⁴ would truly be a reality only wherever the gospel is embraced. It would be the *now*⁵ that anticipates a greater *not yet*.⁶

The comment, *they will reign* (Greek future: *basileusousin*) on the earth⁷ looks forward to the time when Jesus' right to rule over the earth becomes literal and actual in practice. While this earth is the very place where believers are so often rejected and mistreated, they are invited to look forward to the day when they will participate in Jesus' full reign over the earth. This is the language of empire. Jesus is the *King of kings*,⁸ making him an emperor, like the emperor in Rome who ruled over many lesser kings around the empire, Herod being an example. In calling believers already a kingdom or kings (see textual notes on Rev 5:9-10 below), Jesus invites them to spread the word that the war is already over and that the true king has been installed on the heavenly throne. Believers are thus direct representatives of the throne in heaven in all their interactions on earth. This message is designed to provide meaning and purpose to everything believers do in this earth. And they can look forward to the ultimate installation of Jesus' kingdom, when the *not yet*⁹ becomes *now*.¹⁰

Rev 5:9-10B There are multiple interlocking textual issues in these two verses. Many of them relate to the issue of who the twenty-four elders are. Are they singing about themselves when they speak of kings and priests or are they singing in behalf of others?

In verse nine, the majority text (largely late Middle Ages and usually reflected in the King James Version) adds a single word that makes a big difference in the meaning of the text. It reads, *You have purchased. . . us*¹¹ (Greek: *hēmon*). This would support the idea that the twenty-four elders are representatives of redeemed humanity in heaven, which we have determined on other grounds (see Rev 4:4B *Excursus on the Twenty-Four Elders*). But the problem here is not only that the earlier and better manuscripts (supported by most early Bible

translations) leave this word out, but that the song is sung not only by the twenty-four elders, but also by the four living creatures, which appear to be archangels. Are they also redeemed? So it appears that the original likely did not have *us*, thus the song is referring to those on earth who have embraced the gospel. Instead of *us* from every division of humanity, the text reads *some* from every division of human (partitive genitive).

The scholarly text of verse 10 reads *a kingdom* (Greek: *basileian*) and *priests*. This reading is supported by Revelation 1:6 (Greek: *basileian*) and is no doubt influenced by Exodus 19:6, which refers to Israel as a *kingdom of priests* (LXX Greek: *basileian hierateuma*). 1 Peter 2:9 uses essentially the same language for believers, who are a *royal priesthood* (Greek: *basileion hierateuma*). A priest is someone who stands between God and the people. A kingdom of priests would be a nation that stands between God and all the other nations. In this reading, God has transformed believers into a new Israel which is intended to bless the nations through the spreading of the gospel. The majority text of the Greek (supported by one major early manuscript (AB), however, reads *kings* (Greek: *basileis* plural) and *priests*. In this reading those redeemed at the cross have a double identity, they are kings and they are priests. This reading is supported by Revelation 17:14, where the Lamb is portrayed as *king of kings* and the kings with Him are understood to be the *called, chosen and faithful* followers, clearly a reference to believers. While both readings are attractive and compatible with New Testament theology, the earlier and generally better manuscripts favor the reading *a kingdom*.

While in verse nine the Majority Greek Text supports the idea that the singers are redeemed by the cross (you have purchased *us*), in verse ten it goes the other way. The text behind the KJV (a single late manuscript in much of Revelation) reads *He has made us unto our God kings and priests*. But this reading is not reflected by the vast majority of manuscripts in the same period. Both the majority text and the scholarly text agree that the correct reading is *He has made them* (Greek: *autous*). This coheres with the scholarly reading of verse nine (purchased *some*). So the sum of this textual work is to conclude that the singers of the song in Revelation 5:9-10 are not singing about themselves, but about those on earth who have embraced the cross. They have been made a kingdom of priests, a new Israel.

Rev 5:11B *And I saw and heard* the sound of many angels around the throne, and of the four living creatures and of the elders. . . Earlier in the chapter there is a contrast between what John heard (Rev 5:5) and what he saw (5:6). What follows here is both seen and heard. *And I saw* (Greek: *kai eidon*) often introduces a new vision or a new aspect to the vision (see Rev 5:1, 6; 6:1, etc.). In this case, the new aspect to the larger scene is that the larger angelic host are now introduced and join in the sequence of praise. Until now only the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders were featured in the vision, but now a massive influx of participants joins in the praise.

And I saw and heard the sound of many angels around the throne, and of the four living creatures and of the elders. . . In the New Testament, angels are depicted as interested in the affairs of humanity (1 Pet 1:12). In observing human beings they also learn more about God's eternal purposes (Eph 3:10-11). Now that the purpose of the cross has been revealed by

the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, the wider body of angels is ready to join in the chorus.

Ἀround the throne (Greek: *kuklô tou thronou*) in various forms occurred three times in chapter four. First a rainbow (Rev 4:3), then the twenty-four elders (4:4) then the four living creatures were depicted as Ἀall around the throne (see comments on these verses). As with the earlier references, it is not absolutely clear if this means a full circle around the throne or a semi-circle between John and the throne. The throne is depicted in the center or the background, with the four living creatures around it, the elders in the next circle, and the larger multitude of angels in the outer ring.

While the angel hosts are here numbered, in a general way (the text does not say how many thousands are to be multiplied with each other), in Hebrews (12:22) they are considered to be innumerable. It is likely that neither account is intended to be taken completely literally. The key idea is that the number is too large to be counted in detail. In Revelation 7:11, the number of the redeemed is also considered too large to count, so this is clearly hyperbole. The number, in this case, is drawn from Daniel 7:10. On that occasion, it is a judgment scene; ἈThe judgment was set and the books were opened. Here the only book present is sealed and the scene is an enthronement or an inauguration. So Daniel 7 and Revelation 5 are not depicting the same event in history. In Daniel the number was a thousand thousands (LXX: *chiliai chiliades*), here the number is thousands of thousands (Greek: *chiliades chiliadôn*), which is considerably larger. A similar number for God=s host is stated in Psalm 68:17, and in Genesis 24:60, where Rebekah was encouraged to have Ἀthousands of ten thousands of children. In Daniel 8:10, on the other hand, the heavenly host is mentioned, but not numbered).

It is interesting that the phrase Ἀten thousand times ten thousand (Greek: *muriades myriadôn*) occurs again in Revelation 9:16, where it is the number of the demonic end-time army, usually translated as 200,000,000. If 2000 times 2000 is 4,000,000, then the minimum of angels depicted here is 204,000,000. But the expression here seems less precise than that. It is certainly not the sum total of the heavenly host, as that is described in verse thirteen. There is a crescendo of singers in the vision, from four to twenty-four to twenty-eight to some 200,000,000 to the entire universe! In Revelation 7:11-12, the entire body of angels is seen and heard worshipping God (see also 1 Kings 22:19).

Rev 5:12B ἈSaying with a loud voice. . . The present participle for Ἀsaying is masculine because it refers back to the angels (masculineB Greek: *angellôn*) in verse 11. Mention of a loud voice (see also Rev 5:2) makes sense now that an enormous crowd of angels is involved. This phrase introduces a seven-fold doxology. In contrast, the first doxology in the book was only two-fold; glory and dominion (Rev 1:6). The next doxology (Rev 4:11) is three-fold, glory, honor and power. The doxology that follows this one (Rev 7:11) is also seven-fold. The doxologies of Rev 4:11 and 7:11 place an article in front of each praise item. Here there is only one article at the beginning. This means either that special emphasis is being given to the first item, power, or that all seven items are being treated as one. Only the Lamb was powerful enough to open the scroll and He received that power on account of the cross. In the majority text, Ἀriches (the second praise item) also has the article, which would highlight the idea of special emphasis, but

in regard to the first two items instead of just the first.

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain” repeats the sentiment of the previous song in 5:9. This is followed by the seven-fold doxology. Bengel believed that there are seven items of praise here to correspond with the seven seals. A summary of the meaning of these seven terms follows. The term “power” (Greek: *dunamin*) is elaborated in Revelation 11:17, where the end-time reign of God occurs because he has “taken power” and begun to reign. While the New Testament highlights the graciousness and forgiveness of God, it is also clear that He is immensely powerful and not to be trifled with. God’s character blends infinite power with infinite graciousness. He is not only on our side, but is eminently powerful enough to deliver as well as promise. He is certainly powerful enough to rule. This power was already symbolized by the seven horns of the Lamb in 5:6. While the term “riches” (Greek: *plouton*) no doubt refers to the immense wealth at God’s disposal (Rev 3:21), which He freely shares with just and unjust alike (Jam 1:17; Acts 17:25; Matt 5:45-47), it is likely that there is particular emphasis here on spiritual riches, the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8). But it is not one or the other, both are in view.

“Wisdom” (Greek: *sophian*) is personified in the Old Testament as a companion with God and a fellow worker in creation. This position was recognized by New Testament writers to have been filled by Christ (John 1:1-3), so the wisdom designation is very appropriate here. As a result of His experience on earth of life, death and resurrection, the Lamb’s wisdom is uniquely qualified to deal with matters of salvation and the healing of the broken universe. Only He has the qualities needed to open the scroll. If wisdom was ever needed anywhere, it was needed in reconciling the universe to God. Wisdom here recalls the seven eyes of the Lamb (Rev 5:6) and spirit of wisdom, understanding and knowledge possessed by God’s Messiah in Isaiah 11:2.

Attributing “strength” (Greek: *ischun*) to the Lamb means He has the ability to put His power into action. The word often denotes physical strength (Psa 71:9; Mark 12:30; Acts 3:7). The term is also applied to the beast of chapter 17 (Rev 17:13). The strength of Jesus was seen in creation and witnessed while He was on earth in His power over wind and waves, his healing of diseases, and His conquest of death. It will ultimately be demonstrated at the Second Coming.

The word “honor” (Greek: *ti-mên*) can be used to express the value of a sum of money (Acts 7:16; 19:19). But here it is used in a more abstract way to express that a person is highly esteemed by others. They are held in respect and treated as of having high social value. In this context, the Lamb is being held just as high in honor as God the Father is.

“Glory” (Greek: *doxa*) is associated with riches in Ephesians 1:18-19, the riches of the glory of the Father’s inheritance. In fact, both passages mingle riches, glory, power and strength, but these are applied to the Father in Ephesians and to Christ in Revelation five. Glory is similar to honor but is an even higher ascription of praise. While the term honor is commonly used in the human sphere, glory is more associated with deity than with human beings.

“Blessing” (Greek: *eulogian*) translates a word that combines “good” (Greek: *eu*) with “word” (Greek: *logos*). Blessing means to speak a good word about another. The Lamb is worthy of our blessing. Our great mission in life is to speak well of Christ and in so doing we will also speak well of God the Father.

In covenantal terms, blessing is the good outcome of behavior in harmony with the covenant. The good outcome the Lamb desires is the healing of the universe and the salvation of the creatures He loves.

Three of the seven terms in this song were applied by Daniel (2:37) to the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. The God of heaven gave Nebuchadnezzar a kingdom, power, strength and glory. This put him in very distinctive company. The vision of Daniel 2, therefore, supported both the relative greatness of Nebuchadnezzar on this earth and the absolute greatness of the God of Israel, the one who both raises up kings and puts them down (Dan 2:21). In Revelation 5, however, the God of heaven is lauded seven times instead of Nebuchadnezzar's four. The acclamation offered in this verse exceeds anything appropriate to even the greatest of earthly rulers.

Rev 5:13B This verse marks the transition from the fourth hymn of Revelation four and five to the fifth. This transition parallels Psalm 103:20-22, where the angels offer worship and praise to God first, and then are followed in praise by the whole creation. The seven-fold doxology of verse 12 is followed by the four-fold doxology of verse 13. But there is one significant difference. The fourth hymn, like the third (Rev 5:9-10), is sung in praise to the Lamb alone. But his hymn is sung to both the Lamb and to the One sitting on the throne. As such it is the climax of the series of five hymns. The first two are sung to the One sitting on the throne and are grounded on His role in creation. The third and fourth hymns are sung to the Lamb on the grounds of his work of salvation at the cross. This fifth and final hymn is sung to both with no grounds given or necessary. The full deity of Christ is here put explicitly on display. While the text does not explicitly place the Lamb on the throne, verse 6 tells us that He is in the midst (Greek: *en mesô*) of the throne, and Revelation 22:1 affirms that "God and the Lamb" share a single throne. Ancient thrones were more like couches than armchairs, so this concept of a double throne would not have startled ancient readers.

"And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and upon the sea, and all that is in them. . . ." When John tries to express the praise of the whole creation he draws on the four great regions of creation in the ancient mind; heaven and earth, under the earth, and the sea. Similar expressions are found in Exodus 20:11, Psalm 146:6, Philippians 2:10; and Revelation 14:7. Often translated "in the sea," the original is worded "upon the sea" (Greek: *epi tes thalasses*), which would emphasize those traveling in ships and also the sea creatures visible on the surface. The later phrase "all that is in them" would include all creatures in these four realms, including the sea creatures that are not visible on the surface.

The reference here is not to the entire physical universe, but to "every creature" which God has placed there. In terms of timing, this is in the context of the Lamb taking the book in AD 31. But this song expands the scene from a particular point in time to the timeless worship of God in eternity through the use of the final phrase "forever and ever." This makes it also a foreshadowing of Revelation 20:12-13, the day when all who have ever lived will stand before God in judgment. In the end all, including those who reject Him, will acknowledge the justice and truth that lies at the foundation of God's rule in the universe (Rev 15:3-4). At this point in time "every knee [will] bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil 2:9-11. ESV).

While the Lamb taking the scroll in Revelation 5 happens in conjunction with the ascension of Jesus, the glory of the acclamation becomes so great it anticipates the great gathering at the end of the millennium. Through His sacrifice, Jesus has won the hearts of the entire inhabited universe. The praise of the Father and the Son that begins on this auspicious occasion extends into eternity.

ⒶUnder the earth. . .Ⓜ In speaking of death Job describes the tomb as a land of deep shadow and darkness (Job 10:20-22), in Hebrew terms, the land of Sheol (Isa 14:9). So Ⓐunder the earth,Ⓜ presumably, would refer to those who have died at present but will one day rise to join in the final acclamation. This interesting phrase, however, raises the question whether it refers only to the dead (who will be raised before or after the millenniumⒷ Rev 20:4-6, 12-13), or whether it also refers to the domain of Satan and his angels. Luke 8:31 suggests that the demons prefer to be on the surface of the earth, but that the ⒶabyssⓂ is a place where they can be confined by God (see comments on Rev 9:1 and 20:1). So Ⓐunder the earthⓂ is placed alongside Ⓐforever and everⓂ as evidence that this final song not only completes the acclamation of a particular time and place (AD 31), but anticipates the great gathering at the end of the millennium.

ⒶAnd I heard every creature which is in heaven or on earth or under the earth or upon the sea and all that is in them, saying, ⒶTo the One sitting on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and strength forever and ever.Ⓜ This song is directly linked to the previous one. The last praise item in verse 12 is ⒶblessingⓂ (Greek: *eulogia*). That last word becomes the first word of the four-fold doxology in verse 13. The four praise items in this fifth hymn are all found in the fourth hymn of verse 12. But there is one significant difference. In this song all the praise items are preceded with the Greek article (*hê eulogia, hê ti-mê, hê doxa, to kratos*), which brings an emphasis to the quality of each item: all blessing, all honor, all glory and all strength. The shift from seven to four praise items is not to diminish the hymn, since the number four signifies the whole creation.

The main function of this final hymn is to climax all four hymns. The first two hymns focus on the One sitting on the throne. The next two focus on the Lamb. And this final hymn focuses praise on both divine figures.

Rev 5:14B ⒶAnd the four living creatures said, >Amen.= And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped.Ⓜ Little new information is added to the previous. As the mighty song of acclamation echos through the heavens and slowly fades into silence, the four living creatures quietly say ⒶAmen,Ⓜ and the twenty-four elders fall down and worship. The four living creatures had the first word in this vision (Rev 4:8), now they get the last word as well. The whole scene ends with a ⒶwhimperⓂ of satisfaction and completion. Reading this conclusion in the Greek is very moving. I am reminded of one of my professors, Mervyn Maxwell, who loved to preface the ⒶamenⓂ with a long, gentle sigh. There is nothing more to say, nothing more to do. The universe is whole again and all is well. A scene that began in stunned silence now ends in a satisfied silence. All has come full circle.

Within early Judaism, there were four qualities that distinguished the one God from all

other beings. The one God was the sole Creator, the sole Ruler, the bearer of a unique name (Yahweh), and the only one worthy of worship. While secondary beings like angels could assist God in creation and rule, those activities were always under God=s direction, never things they could contemplate on their own. The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus was included in the one God of Judaism. He created all things (John 1:3) and bears the unique name of the one God (Phil 2:9-11). And in this visionary passage, it is clear that He also rules the universe and is worthy of worship. However one describes the distinctions between the One sitting on the throne and the Lamb, they are clearly both included in the one God of Judaism. The vision of Revelation 4 and 5 is one of the most powerful affirmations of the full deity of Jesus Christ.

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Rev 4-5 (Summary and Conclusion) Revelation 4 describes a timeless description of worship in heaven. This is not a point in time, rather it portrays a general description of the worship that is constantly going on in heaven (Rev 4:2, 8, 9). The central theme of the passage is the throne. Everything that happens in the chapter, happens in relation to the throne. Things occur on the throne, all around the throne, in front of the throne, and out from the throne. The Old Testament background of this chapter is the five throne scenes in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 1 and 10, Isaiah 6, Daniel 7, 1 Kings 22 [and its parallel in 2 Chr 18] and Exodus 19). The worship and praise in the chapter is directed to the one sitting on the throne on the grounds of creation (4:11). Chapter 4 not only sets the stage for chapter 5, but to some degree introduces the entire visionary portion of the book of Revelation (chapters 4-22).

Chapter 5 shifts from a general description of heavenly worship to a specific point in time, a moment of crisis in the heavenly throne room. There is a sealed scroll in the hands of the One sitting on the throne. Apparently the issue with the scroll is so large even God cannot solve it. But a slain Lamb appears and is accounted worthy to break the seals and open the scroll. This results in three songs of acclamation in which the Lamb and the One sitting on the throne are praised because the Lamb was slain and paved the way for the redemption of the human race.

This scene portrays both the royal and priestly roles of Jesus Christ. In terms of His royal role, this is His enthronement over the universe and the validation of His messianic kingship over the earth. But being seated on the royal throne means He is also qualified to minister as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary (as is extensively portrayed also in Hebrews). So in terms of Jesus= priestly role, this scene is the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary. Hebrews and Revelation together give us the full picture of Jesus= heavenly ministry after the ascension. The heavenly sanctuary plays a major role in introducing each of the visions that follows the Lamb=s taking of the scroll (Rev 5, 8:3-5; 11:19; 15:5-8, etc.). This dual role of Christ is the basis for the Holy Spirit=s actions on earth, giving the fruit and the gifts of the Spirit to all who believe in Jesus (Rev 5:6; Gal 5:22-23; Eph 4:8-11).

After careful exegesis we concluded that the scene of the Lamb taking the book represents the enthronement of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary on the day of Pentecost in AD 31. Seen in the light of this chapter, that enthronement, along with the cross, is the central event of in the history of the universe. This event was grounded in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a mighty act of God on the same scale as Creation, the Flood and

the Exodus. With this event, the victory over sin and Satan was assured for all time. The advent of Jesus Christ to this earth was the end of the beginning. The coming of His kingdom, confirmed in Revelation 5, is the beginning of the end. The death, resurrection and enthronement of Christ together is the towering act of the New Testament era. This action sets the context for the seven seals of chapter 6 and beyond. To that chapter we now turn.



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