

Revelation Chapter Five

The Seven-Sealed Scroll (vv. 1-14)

The Scroll's Enactor (v.1)

VERSE 1 I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne (Καὶ εἶδον ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιὰν τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου [*conj kai + aor.act.ind.1s. horao see + prep epi on, upon + art.w/adj.acc.f.s. dexois right (hand) + art.w/pres.dep.part.gen.m.s. kathemai sit + prep epi upon + art.w/noun gen.m.s. thronos throne*] **a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals** [βιβλίον γεγραμμένον ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν κατεσφραγισμένον σφραγίσιν ἑπτὰ [*noun acc.nt.s. biblion scroll + perf.pass.part.acc.nt.s grapho write + adv esothern within, inside + conj kai + adv opisthen behind, on the back + perf.pass.part.acc.nt.s. katasphragizo seal up + noun instr.f.p. sphragis seal + adj.instr.f.p. hepta seven*]).

ANALYSIS: VERSE 1

1. Having been given the setting of the heavenly throne room, the prophet now views the second scene in the same setting.
2. The center-piece of this new scene is as remarkable scroll and a single individual who alone is qualified to take it from the hand of the one on the throne.
3. Four new scenes (5:1; 5:2-5; 5:6-10; 5:11-14) of the vision currently in progress are introduced by *kai eidon* (“and I saw”) in this chapter.
4. The throne room described in chapter 4 functions as the setting of these scenes, the first of which introduces a scroll whose contents comprise chapters 6 through 19 of the Apocalypse.
5. The scroll lies *on (epi)* the open palm of the one sitting upon the throne.
6. It was not held *in* His hand, as that would have required by the preposition *en* (“in”) as John uses it in Rev.10:2, 8.
7. The hand could be cupped to retain a round object without balancing, yet still open.
8. The natural meaning of *epi* followed by the accusative case is “on” or “upon.”
9. The placement of the scroll in the Father’s possession indicates its source, the supreme authority of the revelation contained in its contents, and the assurance of adequate power to execute its contents.
10. A ancient scroll was made by processing either papyrus or skins from various animals.
11. OT parallels to this scroll are Isa. 29:11-12; Jer. 36:10-25; Ezek. 2:9-10; Dan. 12:4.
12. This was not a book, consisting of separate pages, bound together like a modern book.
13. The question of the use of the verb “to open” (*aniogo*) for unrolling a scroll is answered by referring to Isa. 37:14, LXX, where the verb is used in this situation.
14. In Revelation, this verb is particularly fitting because of the seals that must be broken or opened to divulge the scroll’s contents (cf. 5:9).
15. Two reasons are particularly persuasive in concluding that *biblion* (from which we get “bible”) here is in a roll-form.
16. One is the appropriateness of the adverbial expression “inside and outside” to a scroll as opposed to a book.

17. “Inside” means inside the scroll before unrolling, and “on the back” refers to the back side of the scroll after it is unrolled.
18. The other reason is that papyrus codices did not originate until the second century AD, or perhaps the late first century at the earliest.
19. John’s work under primitive conditions at Patmos could therefore hardly have been in book format.
20. It must have been in the form of a scroll, such as found in Ezek. 2:9 and 3:1.
21. A number of proposals with regard to the scroll’s contents have been advanced.
22. One view sees it as the book of the New Covenant of Jer. 31:31-34, because the promised kingdom instituted in Rev. 20:1ff. is fulfillment of that covenant.
23. This is wrong because the new covenant of Jeremiah is one of mercy, and the setting of this scroll is manifestly one of wrath.
24. Another proposal is, that the scroll is a testament or will assuring that the inheritance is reserved by God for the saints.
25. Several reasons are advanced to support this view.
26. In that day a Roman will had to be sealed seven times to make it valid, reminiscent of the seven seals on this scroll.
27. Also, Rev. 11:15 announces the inheritance of Christ and the saints who will reign with Him (cf. 5:9).
28. This explains the tumultuous joy that prevails in chapter 5.
29. The problem with the “inheritance” theory is that the Apocalypse nowhere supports it.
30. The only reference to an inheritance is Rev. 21:7 and is quite incidental.
31. The seals and trumpets do not deal with inheritance of the saints, but with the plagues of judgment to be heaped on rebellious humanity.
32. A third view is that the scroll represents the Lamb’s book of life so prominent elsewhere in Revelation (cf. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27).
33. The fullness of the scroll (i.e., “written [upon], inside and on the back”) could point to the seemingly limitless number of names recorded in on it.
34. As the seals of the book are broken, only tribulation is divulged.
35. A fourth explanation for *biblion* holds that it represents God’s redemptive plan foreshadowed in the OT and completed in the NT.
36. The opening of the book does not reveal the past, i.e., the redemptive work of Christ’s death, but to things yet future at the time of writing.
37. This view is inconsistent with the process described, beginning in chapter 6.
38. A fifth analysis of the scroll is that it represents Christ’s title-deed or contract-deed to the world.
39. This kind of contract was known all over the Middle East in ancient times and was used by the Romans from the time of Nero on.
40. The full contract would be written on the inner pages and sealed with seven seals.
41. Then the content of the contract would be described briefly on the outside.
42. All kinds of transactions were consummated in this way, including marriage-contracts, rental and lease agreements, release of slaves, contract-bills, and bonds.
43. The Hebrew document most closely resembling this scroll was a title-deed that was folded and signed, requiring at least three witnesses.
44. A portion of the text would be written, folded over and sealed, with a different witness signing at each fold.

45. A larger number of witnesses meant that more importance was assigned to the document.
46. Such a document was used to prolong the proceedings when writing a bill of divorce.
47. It was also used in Jeremiah 32 in the recovery of a lost estate.
48. The similarity of *biblion* to the title-deed of Jer. 32:10-14 makes it tempting to identify as the title-deed of all creation, which was forfeited through the entrance of sin in Genesis 3 and reclaimed by Christ through His redemptive death.
49. This fits the emphasis on creation in the song of Rev. 4:11 and the note of great joy that pervades Revelation 5.
50. This explanation approximates the true interpretation, but it still lacks one important element: it fails to account for the contents of the book as reflected in the seal-breaking process beginning in chapter 6.
51. A sixth interpretation of the contents of *biblion* is the correct one.
52. It contains the counsels of God as revealed in the visions beginning at chapter 6.
53. Viewed from God's perspective, these are the judgments that will fall upon the earth during a relatively brief period, eventually at their conclusion issuing in the coming of the promised Messiah and His kingdom.
54. It is a "history" of the future that presents successive steps leading to the inauguration of the world-kingdom of Christ.
55. That an actual reading from the scroll is nowhere recorded in Revelation is no serious problem to this view.
56. The contents are enacted, **not** read.
57. This scroll is a comprehensive account of the future wrath of the Lamb (cf. 6:17) seen in chapters 6 through 19.
58. The horrors of the seal visions alone are sufficient to earn the title "the scroll of doom" (Moffatt).
59. The relation of the scroll to chapter 4 makes clear the plan of Revelation: the eternal and almighty God of Revelation 4 presents in this seven-sealed scroll the decrees of His will regarding the consummation of His kingdom.
60. Subsequently, when the Lamb breaks the seals, it is not merely a disclosure of the scroll's contents, but an activation of those contents.
61. This appraisal of the scroll concurs with the nature of Ezekiel's scroll containing "words of lament mourning and woe" (Ezek. 2:6).
62. The hidden destiny of the world and the events of the last days spoken of in the OT (cf. Isa. 29:11; Dan. 8:26) is now about to end.
63. Actually, the hidden information was made available to humanity long before the prophesied events take place as it is revealed in the 66 book of the canon of Scripture.
64. The seals are about to be broken and everything pertaining to the future is about to be revealed.
65. The purging effect of God's wrath will touch the entire sphere of God's creation.
66. Even the heavens will be cleansed of the evil of the fallen angels.
67. The effects of sin will gradually disappear, and the earth will be restored to its rightful owner.
68. The first of two descriptions of the scroll is furnished in "written [upon], inside and on the back."
69. This compares with the words of Ezek. 2:10.

70. Writing on a scroll was usually limited to one side of the writing material, the inner side of the roll, but sometimes extended to the outer side or back of the material.
71. The latter is the case here and in the Ezekiel parallel.
72. The “spill-over” onto the back symbolizes the fullness of the contents.
73. The decrees of God contained herein are extensive and comprehensive.
74. They constitute the whole counsel of God regarding the future of the world.
75. No further revelation may be anticipated (cf. Rev. 22:18).
76. The second descriptive word about the scroll is the expression “sealed with seven seals.”
77. “Sealed” (*katakspfragizo*) is stronger than the simple word for sealing, its intensification of meaning emphasizing the security of the sealing.
78. This enhances the security of the scroll’s contents in terms of probity of ownership and access.
79. None but the Lamb is worthy to open it.
80. The seal on a scroll kept it closed.
81. Only an authorized person could open it at an authorized time.
82. Such a seal was an impression made on clay, wax, or some other soft material.
83. Use of seven seals stresses profundity of the contents.
84. The manner in which the seals were affixed remains a question.
85. The common way of sealing a scroll was to place its seal or seals on the outer edge so that they all had to be broken before any of the scroll’s content could be read.
86. It has been observed that this is the only way John could have seen all seven seals.
87. Yet, is it?
88. The seals could have been clearly visible at one end (i.e., longitudinal edge) of the scroll, though spread at intervals along the inner part of the scroll.
89. Though contrary to known customs of the day, this is the only explanation that harmonizes with the progressive nature of the revelation associated with the breaking of the seals, one by one.
90. As each seal is broken and the next section of the scroll unrolled to permit viewing, the clear implication of the text is that the dramatization that follows represents that portion of the scroll.
91. The exposure of the scroll’s contents does not await the opening of all seven seals fastened along the single outer extremity of the papyrus roll.
92. It is granted that nothing is read verbatim from the scroll, but with the breaking of each successive seal, part of the scroll’s contents is revealed in prophetic symbolism.
93. Picturing the seals at one end of the scroll is most probable.

The Search (vv.2-5)

Angelic Summons (v.2)

VERSE 2 **And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice** (καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον ἰσχυρὸν κηρύσσοντα ἐν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ [*conj kai + aor.act.ind.1s. eidon or horao see + noun acc.m.s. aggelos angel (acting as a messenger) + adj.acc.m.s. ischuros powerful; “strong” + pres.act.part.acc.m.s. kerusso announce, herald, publicly proclaim + prep en in; “with” + noun instr.f.s. phone voice + adj.instr.f.s. megas great; “loud”*], **"Who is worthy to open**

the book and to break its seals [Τίς ἄξιος ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον καὶ λῦσαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ [*indef/interrog.pro.nom.m.s. tis who + adj.nom.m.s. axios worthy + aor.act.infin. anoigo open + art.w/noun acc.nt.s. biblion scroll, book + conj kai; here the exegetical usage is best; i.e. “even” + aor.act.infin. luo loose, untie, set free, release; “break” + art.w/noun acc.f.p. sphragis seal + pro.gen.nt.s. autos “its”*)]?"

ANALYSIS: VERSE 2

1. The second scene of chapter 5 (vv. 2-5) revolves around finding someone with the necessary credentials to break the seals on the scroll.
2. At first, no one is qualified, causing John much grief.
3. Then comes the good news of the discovery of such a person, bringing an end to John's weeping.
4. If this angel, John sees in his vision, were a named angel, like Gabriel or Michael, he would probably be named here.
5. The adjective “strong” (*ishchuros*) denotes active power rather than reserve power.
6. His strength displays itself here in proclaiming “with a loud voice” his assigned message.
7. His voice is so strong that it reaches the extremities of the 3rd heaven.
8. A loud voice is rather common in the Apocalypse (cf. 1:10; 5:12; 6:10; 7:2, 10; 8:13; 10:3; 11:12, 15; 12:10; 14:7, 9, 15, 18; 16:1, 17; 19:1, 17; 21:3).
9. This angel poses an intriguing question about finding an individual worthy to break the seals of the scroll.
10. The adjective *axios* originally meant “proper weight.”
11. It is a synonym of *hianos* (“sufficient,” adequate”).
12. Both terms refer to quality of being, person, power, or attainment.
13. The nuance of difference between them is that worthiness is the inner aspect of character to open this scroll.
14. The worthiness for this is so great that no created being can contemplate it, much less to attain to it.
15. Only by anticipating the remainder of chapter 5 can the nature of this worthiness be assessed.
16. The worthiness of which *axios* rests is absolute moral and spiritual perfection that God alone possesses.
17. The worthiness here refers to the Lamb's inner moral and spiritual competency.
18. The best explanation of *axios* in the present context refers to worthiness of both the Lamb's messianic authority as the scion of David and His moral competency.
19. In 5:9 the explicit statement is that His worthiness is based on His redemptive death, and in 5:5 it is strongly implied that His worthiness is tied to His messianic office.
20. The two aspects of His person cannot be separated.
21. The sequence of actions “to open the book and to break its seals” is reversed.
22. Normally one would break the seals of a scroll before opening it.
23. The solution is to understand *kai* as *exegetical*, meaning “even,” and the breaking of the seals as a closer specification of what is involved in opening the scroll.
24. In 5:5, a comparable construction with an *exegetical kai* occurs: “to open the scroll, even its seals.”
25. This explanation shows that the opening and the breaking are essentially the same actions.

26. We now move to the meaning of “to open.”
27. One view sees it as an enlargement and continuation of the book of Daniel, describing from God’s perspective the judgments necessary to fulfill all He has foretold.
28. Another related suggestion sees the opening as the revelation of divine counsels and judgments.
29. Both of these suggestions falter in one important respect, however.
30. If only revelation were included in the opening of the scroll, others worthy of the task could have been found.
31. The OT prophets, for example, revealed the future (Amos 3:7), but they were unable to implement their predictions in history.
32. So *anoixai* (“to open”) must include not only the telling of the prophecies/judgments contained in the scroll, but also the ability to make them come true.
33. As the Lamb breaks the seals, one by one, beginning in chapter 6, there follows His execution of the events revealed in each section of the scroll as well.

Futile Search (v.3)

VERSE 3 And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to

open the book or to look into it (καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ οὐδὲ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐδὲ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον οὔτε βλέπειν αὐτό [*conj kai + pro.nom.m.s. oudeis nobody + imperf.dep.ind.3s. dunamai be able + prep en + art.w/loc.m.s. ouranos heaven + neg.conj. oude neither + prep epi upon + art.w/gen.f.s. ge earth + neg.conj. oude neither + prep hupokato below, under + art.w/gen.f.s. ge earth + aor.act.infin. anoigo open + art.w/noun acc.nt.s. biblion scroll + neg.conj. oude neither + pres.act.infin. blepo see, look at + pro.acc.nt.s. autos it*]).

ANALYSIS: VERSE 3

1. A search of the universe fails to turn up anyone able to open the scroll or view its contents.
2. The search was conducted by the only One who is capable of such an undertaking in so short of a time.
3. The divine attributes of omnipresence and omniscience are in view in this search of the universe.
4. The threefold division of creation is expressed in the words “in heaven or on the earth or under the earth.”
5. Here the comprehensive expression is an emphatic way of designating the whole universe.
6. Each region specified could not produce someone qualified to open the scroll.
7. Identification of the third realm, “under the earth,” refers to the place of departed spirits and demons.
8. Even the elect angels who have never sinned were not worthy to open the scroll, as none of them possessed the messianic qualifications associated with the incarnation of Jesus Christ (He alone is uniquely qualified).
9. Since no one can open the scroll, no one can examine its contents.
10. The expression “look into it” does not mean that no one is able to look at the exterior cover of the scroll, as would be the case if *oute* (“or”) introduced a climax.
11. The expression “or to look into it” means rather that because of an inability to break the seals, no one could read the writing upon the scroll.

John's Grief (v.4)

VERSE 4 Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to

open the book or to look into it (καὶ ἔκλαιον πολὺ, ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἄξιος εὐρέθη ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον οὔτε βλέπειν αὐτό [*conj kai + imperf.act.ind.1s. klaio weep + adv polu much + conj hoti because + pro.nom.m.s. oudeis nobody + adj.nom.m.s. axios worthy + aor.pass.ind.3s. eurisko find + aor.act.infin. anoigo open + art.w/noun acc.nt.s. biblion book, scroll + neg.conj. oute neither + pres.act.infin. blepo see + pro.acc.nt.s. autos it*]);

ANALYSIS: VERSE 4

1. In John's visionary experience he was very upset to the point of tears over the absence of a qualified being who could open the scroll and reveal its contents.
2. The qualifying adverb "greatly" indicates that he did actually begin sobbing.
3. The verb "weep" (*klaio*) is used a number of times in the NT to describe mourning (e.g., Matt. 2:18; Mk. 5:38, 39; Lk. 7:13, 32; 8:52).
4. In fact the weeping of Jesus contrasts with those mourning over the death of Lazarus where John uses *drakuo* ("weep") rather than *klaio* to describe His crying (cf. Jn. 1:33, 35).
5. While it would be a mistake to imply that John's response to the situation was anything less than genuine, it is still quite probable that his was a loud wail, as the word usually denoted.
6. The addition of "greatly" (or "loudly") indicates an even louder outcry.
7. This weeping was unrestrained emotion by one who was in an ecstatic state.
8. An investigation into the specific reason(s) for John's emotional outburst is revealing.
9. An initial response might be that he wept over the moral incapability of all created beings.
10. This explanation is too superficial, however.
11. The sequence of revelatory experience through which John had just come demands a more profound reason.
12. After all, he had long before known about the depravity of humanity and the sin-cursed world.
13. A second possibility is that he wept because he feared that the hoped-for revelation, promised in 4:1, would now be withheld.
14. Such revelation depended on the opening of the scroll.
15. Though closer to the truth, this view is deficient in depicting John in the wrong light.
16. He certainly was not one who wept in disappointment because his curiosity was apparently going to be left unfulfilled.
17. The most plausible explanation for his outburst is his fear that the events contained in the revelatory scroll would remain unfulfilled, thus thwarting the purposes of God.
18. As already shown in the discussion of verse 3 above, opening the scroll included the power to implement the things revealed therein, so the disappointment is over more than just withholding of revelation.
19. John was not weeping for his own sake, but over the apparent indefinite postponement of God's final plan for the ages.
20. He did not want to see God's vindication of His people lapse.
21. So he broke out in uncontrolled sobbing.

22. Even though John was in a ecstatic state (e.g., 4:2), he throughout this experience was left free to exercise his volition as well as his sin nature.
23. Both here and in chapter 1 verse 17 he engaged in mental attitude fear.
24. In both instances he was told to stop what he was doing as there was no call for his actions.

John's Distress Relieved (v.5)

VERSE 5 and one of the elders said to me (καὶ εἷς ἐκ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων λέγει μοι [*conj kai + adj.nom.m.s. heis one + prep ek from + art.w/adj.abl.m.p. presbuteros elder + pres.act.ind.3s. lego say + pro.dat.s. ego "me"*]), **"Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals** [*neg me "stop" + pres.act.imper.2s. klaio weep, cry + interj idou behold + aor.act.ind.3s. nikao be victorious, prevail, overcome + art.w/noun nom.m.s. leon lion + art.nom.m.s. + prep ek from + art.w/noun gen.f.s. phule tribe + noun gen.m.s. Ioudas Judah + art.w/noun f.s. hriza root, scion, descendant + noun gen.m.s. David David + aor.act.infin. anoigo open "to open" + art.w.noun acc.nts. biblion scroll, book + conj kai + adj.acc.f.p. hepta seven + noun acc.f.p. sphragis seal + pro.gen.nt.s. autos it]*]."

ANALYSIS: VERSE 5

1. At this point in the vision, a member of the elite 24 elders intervenes to relieve John's distress.
2. The search for a person worthy to break the seven-sealed document purposely excluded the one individual that possesses all the qualifications to both open and implement the divine decrees inscribed in the scroll.
3. The situation of the futile search is designed to underscore the celebrityship of the Lamb.
4. Obviously John will not so conduct himself at the time when the details of the chapters 4 and 5 are prophetically realized.
5. John's failure in his virtual reality vision is not to be transferred to the time of the actual unfolding of these events.
6. John will be there as one of the resurrected apostles.
7. John reacted to the futile search as he would have had he been confronted with this in real life.
8. The elder steps forward to inform the seer (John) both here and in chapter 7 verse 13.
9. On the occasion of actual fulfillment just after the Bema Seat no one will be upset or confused with respect to the drama of presenting the singular candidate who is worthy to open the scroll of judgment.
10. That is because all present will be absent the ISTA, and will be in possession of the realm of divine viewpoint, being under ultimate sanctification.
11. The directive of the elder is to "stop crying."
12. The elder is fully adjusted to what John is not.
13. John's failure to pass this test is attributed to his own lack of self-discipline on this occasion.

14. The same directive came for Jesus' lips twice, once the occasion of the raising of the widow's son at Nain (Lk. 7:13), and again when He was about to raise Jarius' daughter from the dead (Lk. 8:52).
15. Weeping was not appropriate on those occasions because of what Jesus was about to do: raise people from the dead.
16. It was even less fitting for John because of who and what Jesus was.
17. John should have waited for the announcement regarding the one who was worthy.
18. He should have not allowed himself to be intimidated by the verdict that no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll.
19. He should have remained steadfast in his belief system.
20. The elder prefaces his announcement with "behold", a common occurrence in the Apocalypse.
21. Immediately following the exclamatory interjection in the Greek comes the verb "He has overcome" signaling that this is an occasion for joy rather than sorrow.
22. The nuance of the verb *nikao* (be victorious, win, prevail, overcome) is "prevail" throughout this book when God's people are victors in the Angelic Conflict (e.g., 2:7, 11; 12:12; 15:2).
23. God's purposes will not be thwarted through a permanently closed scroll as John feared, said the elder, so the prophet can stop his crying.
24. Christ's overcoming refers back to the days of His incarnation in which He came through sinless so as to be fully qualified to act as the sin-bearer.
25. This usage of the verb in connection with the Son of God occurs both here and in Rev. 3:21.
26. The descriptive titles the elder employs identifying the one alone who is worthy comes from Genesis 49:9 where Judah is so described.
27. Here that tribe's noblest son is fitly called its lion.
28. Here is the one whose strength, majesty, courage, and menace as well as intellectual excellence resembles qualities of the "king of the beasts."
29. A second title used to identify the One singularly qualified to break the seals is "the root of David."
30. "Root" refers to what springs from and therefore represents a root.
31. It is as metaphorical term for "offspring."
32. John's fondness for this title "*he riza David*" derives from Isa. 1:1, 10 (cf. also Jer. 23:5; 33:15) and characterizes Christ's rulership in the final Davidic kingdom (cf. Rom. 15:12).
33. Jesus' Davidic descent was frequently acknowledged among early Christians.
34. Both "the lion of the tribe of Judah" and "the root of David" are familiar OT Messianic titles but they are linked together only here in the NT.
35. The title "the root of David" places emphasis upon Christ humanity.
36. It is by virtue of Jesus' membership in David's family that He is called the greatest of the tribe of Judah and a branch from the root of David.
37. In this chapter Christ achieves victory and exaltation through suffering.
38. This focuses attention upon His humanity.
39. The consequence of Jesus' victory over sin and death is expressed by "He has prevailed to open."
40. This is a shade different from calling the opening a *result* of His victorious redemptive work, because at the time of winning the victory the result was only anticipated.

41. It is also better to see the opening as a purpose of rather than what constitutes the victory, because the significance of the opening of the seals is far-reaching, including the implementation of what is revealed.
42. The opening of the scroll is best seen as the object or purpose of Jesus' victory.
43. The reason He won the victory was to enable Him to open this scroll of destiny and its seals and implement God's purposes throughout the final stages of the rule of man.