

## Coronation!

At the **right hand** (5:1) of the Father sits a **scroll**. It has **writing inside and out**, and it is **sealed with seven seals**. We have already seen that “seven” indicates perfection and completeness. But **who is worthy to open the scroll** (5:2)?

**No one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it** (5:3). Not one being in any part of the universe was **worthy**. The search went *everywhere*. Even the Father, the Creator, wasn't worthy!<sup>1</sup> This led John to **weep greatly** (5:4).<sup>2</sup> His crying leads us to think that John understood the scene and the significance of opening the scroll. This wasn't just a screenplay in front of him. It was personally important. Then **one of the elders told him, "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"** (5:5).

Jesus is worthy because **He was slain, and purchased for God with His blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation** (5:9). But why does the Cross make Him worthy to open the scroll when the Father isn't? After all, aren't both of them God?

If we look at Paul's<sup>3</sup> discussion in Hebrews 9, the answer becomes clear. If this scroll represents a covenant, it contains instructions that are to be followed after the symbolic death of the covenant-maker.<sup>4</sup> If we look back at 1:3, there is a blessing given to anyone who **keeps** the words of Revelation. 22:7 says the same thing. It's getting to be clear that Revelation is intended for instruction. But instruction in what?

Jesus is **the Lion of Judah** (Gen 49:9) and **the Root of David** (Isa 11:10; 53:1-2). Certainly, since Jesus **overcame**, John would expect to see a triumphant Jesus. But instead of a **Lion**, he is shown a **lamb, standing as if slain** (5:6). And this introduces a pattern.

First, John was *told* one thing, but he *saw* something else. That already happened in chapter 1, when he *heard* the **voice like a trumpet** (1:10), but *saw* Jesus. But this time there is something else going on. Because a lamb could be a sin offering (Lev 4:32) or the Passover sacrifice (Lev 12:3-5), let's play detective.

In the last chapter we figured out the players in this scene. The **living creatures** and the **elders** both represented Israel. Since there were twenty-four courses of priest (the elders), and all of them were present, this identifies the scene as one of the three feasts that all of the priests and all of the men of Israel had to attend. Those feasts are Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Deut 16:16). Passover was the only one with a sacrificial lamb.

Because of Passover, Israel was freed from Egyptian slavery. Jesus' death as our Passover frees us from sin slavery (1 Cor 5:7). And here we see Passover represented symbolically. But in the same sentence, there is more.

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<sup>1</sup> Before you get excited, remember that the Father is already in the scene, and the text says *nobody* could be found who was worthy. That *has* to include the Father!

<sup>2</sup> The Greek word used here suggests the bitter wailing of mourners for the dead. John didn't just sob, he cried inconsolably.

<sup>3</sup> There is academic argument about whether Paul wrote Hebrews. I subscribe to the view that he did. If you disagree, insert the name of your preferred choice in place of “Paul.”

<sup>4</sup> A full discussion of the making of a covenant is beyond us here. But we can say that a covenant is a bond in blood, administered by the sovereign. Following the pattern in Genesis 15, we note that Jesus says that the cross will be “the new covenant in His blood” (Luke 22:20). That is, in place of the symbolic death of animals, which symbolically suffer the penalty of the covenant-breaker, Jesus will Himself suffer that penalty on the cross.

The **lamb has seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth** (5:6). The Holy Spirit was sent into **all the earth** on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). So this scene also represents that festival. And another pattern is established.

The symbolic part of Revelation is built around the festival calendar. Passover and Pentecost were spring festivals, typologically fulfilled in Christ's first advent.<sup>5</sup> Revelation presents them as completed. The fall festivals; Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles will be fulfilled as the story moves on. And the entire calendar serves as the "backbone" of the symbolic part of the book.

Before we figure out what's in the scroll, let's listen to more of the scene.

**And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them *to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.*"**  
(5:8-10)

When Jesus takes the scroll, the **living creatures and elders**, true Israel – God's kingdom of priests, bursts into praise. They present **incense, the prayers of the saints** in tremendous thanksgiving. This is a royal celebration. They praise Jesus because he **purchased men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation with His blood**. You can't get any more universal than that. No group of people has been left out. And this praise isn't just from "Jewish" voices.

In Exodus 19:5-6, God promised the Israelites they would be a kingdom of priests *if* they would "keep My covenant." Here, **God made even Gentiles to be priests to our God**. Since the elders are priests, the representatives of Israel before God, and some of them are Gentiles, "Israel" is now made up of believers from every ethnic group.<sup>6</sup> God "broke down the barrier of the dividing wall" (Eph 2:14) between Jews and Gentiles.

This uniquely "Jewish" scene is in the temple where Gentiles were forbidden.<sup>7</sup> Only the faithful could come that near to God. But a converted Gentile was "joined to the Lord" (Isa 56:3), and could participate in Temple services. Now we see Gentiles who have received the promise to Israel. They have become part of the holiest tribe in Israel, and are in every way true Jews.

**The living creatures and elders** (5:11) continue to praise. Their voices are joined by **myriads and myriads and thousands of thousands of angels**. And they aren't content to be quiet about it. Using a **loud voice** (5:12) they cry out, **Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!** With seven-fold worthiness, Jesus receives the kingdom. And with this **every created thing which is in**

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<sup>5</sup> Typology is a form of prophecy where a person, place, or event is an acted-out prophecy of a future person, place, or event. When Paul says that "Christ our Passover is sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7), he is pointing to the Passover as a *type*. That is, it is an event that tells us the essential nature of a future, larger event. The Passover lamb points to the cross, the *antitype*. Since the Passover lamb led to deliverance from physical Egypt, Christ as Passover lamb leads to deliverance from spiritual Egypt (11:18).

<sup>6</sup> This is the point of Paul's argument in Romans 11:16-26. Unbelieving Jews are broken off from the olive tree named "Israel." Believing Gentiles are grafted into the olive tree. "In this manner" (Rom 11:26, literal translation) all the believers ("Israel") will be saved. This is discussed at length in chapter 2 of *I Want to be Left Behind* (BibleOnly Press, Maitland, FL, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> There was death penalty for Gentiles who entered the Temple.

**heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them** joins the chorus. Such a celebration is worth a moment of our time.

It was not unusual for prophets to speak of nature crying out for deliverance.

O Sing to the LORD a new song, for He has done wonderful things. His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him. The LORD has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered His lovingkindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth; Break forth and sing for joy and sing praises. Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre; with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn shout joyfully before the King, the LORD. Let the sea roar and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it. Let the rivers clap their hands; Let the mountains sing together for joy before the LORD; for He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity. (Psalm 98)

When man fell in Eden, nature was cursed (Gen 3:17-18). So it's not unreasonable to see nature crying out for redemption from the curse the same way man has to be redeemed. In this Psalm, man is called to sing "a new song" because the Lord "revealed" his righteousness to the entire world. While this can refer in general to His "invisible attributes" (Rom 1:20, Psa 19:1-4), it's really focused on the advent of the Messiah and the cross. The "sea and all it contains," "the world," "the rivers," and "the mountains" are to join in the song. As a result of the cross, Jesus will judge. In essence, this Psalm is a celebration of Jesus' enthronement. And because it is parallel in many ways to Revelation 4-5, it helps us see the nature of the ceremony there. But first, let's read the final line of the chapter.

**"To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped. (5:13-14)**

The key word here is **dominion**. The Greek *kratos* signifies the power of the sovereign Lord. By picking up the **scroll**, Jesus completed the ceremony that gave him power to rule. And we know when that happened.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (Matt 28:18)

When Jesus ascended after the resurrection, He was inaugurated as our King (Php 2:9-11). Paul tells us that this came as a result of His death on the cross (Php 2:8), the same reason Jesus is **worthy to open the scroll**. And this leaves us with a puzzle. What's the big deal about opening the scroll? To answer that, we have to look at the scene again.

First we saw representatives of Israel around the throne of the sovereign. Then we saw a scroll sitting on the throne to the right of the Father. Jesus picked it up and rejoicing broke out. If we are Jewish, this scene is familiar. It's the process of crowning a new king in Israel. The Old Testament fills in the story.

The steps in crowning a new Hebrew king are listed in the box. Jesus was anointed (1) when He was baptized in the Jordan (Matt 3:17). He was acclaimed (2) by the Holy Spirit. Jesus wrote the Law (3) and delivered it at Sinai. He received His copy of the Law (4) from the position at the right hand of the father, where it was lying on the throne. And finally, all of true Israel celebrates (5) His coronation.

<b>Steps in Crowning a New King</b>	
1.	The new king is anointed (1 Sam 16:13, 2 Kgs 9:6)
2.	He is acclaimed by the people (1 Kgs 1:39)
3.	He writes a copy of the Law in the presence of the priests (Deut 17:14-20)
4.	He receives the copy of the Law when he is crowned in the Temple (2 Kgs 11:9-12)
5.	He is acclaimed by the people (2 Kgs 11:12)

We now know what's going on. This is the crowning of our great King. But what's the big deal about the scroll? Certainly the Father is worthy to open the Torah scroll. After all, He and Jesus are both fully divine. And it's pretty hard to imagine a circumstance where they were not both in full agreement on the contents of Torah. They both already know what it says! There's got to be something more. And there is.

Let's back up a bit. The Torah was around long before the cross. Suppose Jesus hadn't lived a sinless life. Or maybe He gave in to the temptation to simply do away with His tormentors, and came down from the cross. The plan of salvation would have fallen apart. And it would have failed for a very specific reason.

Salvation is based on the covenant. It's a contract.<sup>8</sup> The terms are spelled out in Torah. Basically, Jesus says that the wages of sin is death (Rom 3:23). But, I love you so much that I will pay that penalty for you. All you have to do is have faith in me. If Christ had not died on the cross, he would not have done His part. In legal terms, the cross is His *bona fides*. He *has* to do His part to be able to require you to do yours. And that is why the cross makes Jesus worthy to open the scroll. Opening the scroll isn't just to let Jesus read it. It lets Him *enforce* it.

The scroll of the Law contains the covenant. Because He died for us on the cross, Jesus is able to say, "I did my part. Now, look in the scroll and see what you have to do."

The celebration is now understandable. The Israel of God (Gal 6:16) celebrates because Jesus **purchased them with His blood**. The angels celebrate because all is no longer lost for man. And John can stop crying because Israel has a King. Before the cross, people kept the covenant in hopeful anticipation that it would be fulfilled. We follow it now because Jesus' death guaranteed fulfillment.

This scene introduces the symbolic part of the book. When Jesus dictated the message to the church from the Temple, every part of that message had its roots in the introductory scene. The same is true here. Every part of the book from here on has its roots in Jesus' coronation as our covenant king. And the book of the covenant is the foundation of every vision to come. Now that the king has been crowned, we are ready to see the *Covenant Displayed*.

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<sup>8</sup> Technically, it's an adhesion contract. To illustrate, let's consider a driver's license. It's a privilege to drive, not a right. The state sets the terms, and there is no negotiation. You meet the terms, or you don't drive. In the same way, the divine covenant offers us the privilege to live. We don't have to. But if we want to, we have to accept the covenant and meet its conditions. If we don't, God will eventually stop giving us life. We will die.