

# REVELATION

## Chapter 5

### *The Scroll and the Lamb*

**Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” 3 And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, 4 and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 5 And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” 6 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. 8 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” 11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” 13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” 14 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.**

5:1-7 Jesus Christ is introduced in the vision of God’s heavenly glory as the victorious Lamb. He is presented to the heavenly host as the one who can receive the scroll from God and look into it. His receiving the scroll from God is also a demonstration and a vindication that his death and resurrection were a victory for God and his people (5:9) (CC p. 134)

5:1 *in the right hand* – The scroll with its seven seals in the right hand of God contains a prophetic message that for the moment is closed to everyone. Yet, because Revelation begins with the idea that a revelation was about to be given concerning events that must soon happen (1:1–3), it is possible that the contents of the scroll focused on the future—a future which was unknown, but which also was important and necessary for God’s people on earth to know. But for the moment as John gazed at the sealed scroll, its message was hidden. And it would remain closed and its contents unknown until the worthy person came to claim it. (CC pp. 134-135)

His right hand is the hand of His divine power and majesty. (Poellot)

“Within the authority and control, consistent with the character of the One sitting in the place of authority. (Eschelbach)

*scroll..* Symbolizes God’s plan of salvation. (TLSB)

βιβλίον—This originally meant a “strip of βύβλος,” that is, a “strip of papyrus taken from a papyrus shrub or plant,” and it was commonly used to designate a “sheet of papyrus paper.” In the Greek world, writing paper made of papyrus replaced the wooden tablet as early as the sixth century B.C. Papyrus sheets sewn together, forming a roll, comprised the book of the ancient world. βιβλίον thus became the common word for a “roll of a book, a scroll.” The LXX used it to translate the Hebrew מִגִּילָת־סֵפֶר, “roll of writing” (Jer 36:2 [LXX 43:2 ]) or for סֵפֶר alone (Ex 17:14). When the codex (our modern book) came into use in the latter part of the first or in the early second century A.D., βιβλίον was also used for it. From that time on the context in which βιβλίον appeared determined whether it meant “codex” or “scroll.” (CC p. 131)

How is the word used here in Rev 5:1? The fact that ἀνοῖξει (the aorist infinitive of ἀνοίγω, “to open”) is used in reference to this βιβλίον (5:2–4) could indicate that here it refers to a codex. In classical Greek the common verb for “to open, unroll” a scroll was ἀναπτύσσω. This word appears only once in the NT as a possible reading in Lk 4:17. In Lk 4:16–20 the βιβλίον of Isaiah that was given to Jesus to read was a scroll, for *all sacred texts that were used for public reading in the synagogues were written on scrolls, even after the codex came into common usage*. During the time when the writings of the NT were being composed, ἀνοίγω began to replace ἀναπτύσσω even when used for the unrolling of a scroll. (The variant reading of ἀνοίγω for ἀναπτύσσω in Lk 4:17 indicates such a change.) By the time Revelation was written, ἀνοίγω was commonly used to refer to the opening of both scrolls and codices. Another point that could suggest that the βιβλίον here in Rev 5:1 was a codex is that it was written both within and on the outside. Most scrolls, such as the Dead Sea scrolls, were written on one side only: the front or inside, the side that was hidden and protected when the scroll was rolled up. However, scrolls on rare occasions were written on both sides. The fact that the βιβλίον here in John’s vision was *a sacred writing*, could suggest that it was a scroll, especially if this whole vision is understood *within a Jewish Christian milieu*. Taking everything into consideration, it seems most likely that the βιβλίον here in 5:1 was a scroll, a sacred scroll, and not a codex. (CC p. 131)

We have reason to say that the scroll contained a full statement of “things which must be hereafter,” for we see the unfolding of events with the opening of each of the seven seals. Such a scroll, then, in the hand of the Almighty, is a symbol of God’s omniscience. (Poellot p. 82)

*written within and on the back.* Like the stone tablets of the OT covenant law (Ex 32:15; see Eze 2:9–10). The fibers of a papyrus scroll run horizontally on the inside, which makes writing easier than on the reverse side (where the fibers are vertical). (CSB)

Implies that God’s plan is comprehensive and complete. (TLSB)

*sealed with seven seals.* † Indicating absolute inviolability (cf. Isa 29:11; Da 12:4). Scrolls are sealed because they refer to the future, which is a closed book to men until revealed by God. (CSB)

The scroll in John’s vision is sealed with *seven seals*. Seals offer security and keep the contents safe from any unlawful usage. In Is 29:11 a scroll with words describing a vision is sealed to secure it against any unauthorized reading. In Mt 27:66 the tomb of Jesus was sealed in order to secure it. The Gospel of Peter (33), dated around A.D. 125–150 or earlier, says that the tomb of

Jesus was sealed with seven seals. It was a practice in Roman civil law for a last will and testament to be sealed with seven seals. (CC p. 134)

**5:2-5a** A mighty angel sends out the call for such a worthy figure to come forward and lay lawful claim to the receiving and the opening of the scroll. He cries out with a loud voice, asking if anyone anywhere was worthy to lay claim to the scroll. There was no such figure in all of God's creation, not even among the angels. No one was worthy, for no one had earned the right to stand before the presence of God and lay legal claim to the scroll. John sensed the great need that someone be found to receive the scroll, for he began to weep. Possibly he inferred that the future destiny of God's people was at stake—and as events unfold in Revelation that will be proven to be the case. *Someone* had to claim the scroll for the sake of the destiny of God's people. But who? While the mighty angel introduces the whole action of seeking the worthy one to come forward, it is left up to one of the elders to bring the answer to John's sadness and dismay. (CC pp. 135-136)

Throughout Revelation angels help John as he receives and views the prophetic visions. They assist the prophet in interpreting scenes or lead him through a vision by pointing out details, focusing his attention on them (e.g. 17:1–3, 6–7). But in two instances an elder attends John (5:5; 7:13–14). The suggestion that the elder's "intervention has no symbolical meaning" misses an important point in the entire mediation of the prophetic message in Revelation from Jesus Christ through angels (1:1). *In the two visions that have most to do with the redemption and salvation of God's people and with the resulting triumphal reign of Christ, an elder attends John, not an angel.* Who better than an elevated saint, who himself has gone through the suffering but now is at peace before God's holy presence, to tell John to stop weeping by urging him to look at the Lamb of God? The elder has the honor of pointing John, in the midst of his tears, to the victorious Lamb of God. The imagery is reminiscent of the honor of proclaiming the Gospel that God gives to his church, his people on earth—an honor that not even the angels have in this same measure (see 1 Pet 1:12), though they had the honor of being the first heralds of Christ's birth (Lk 2:8–14) and resurrection (Mt 28:2–6). (CC pp. 135-136)

**5:2 strong angel.** Though John does not explicitly say so, it is likely that this angel is of a different rank from the living creatures described in 4:6-7. Different angels fulfill a variety of functions in Revelation (cf. 1:20; 4:6-7; 7:1; 9:15; 20:1). (TLSB)

*who is worthy* – Greek *axios*, “deserving, fit.” (TLSB)

**5:3 heaven ... earth ... under the earth.** A conventional phrase used to express the universality of the proclamation—no creature was worthy. It is not intended to teach a threefold division of the universe (cf. Ex 20:4; Php 2:10). (CSB)

This reference includes the angels that are there. (Poellot p. 83)

**5:4 I began to weep** – *klaio* – To sob, wail aloud. – I began to weep and continued to do so for some time. (QV)

*no one was found worthy* – Emphasizes Christ's uniqueness, since He alone is worthy (v. 5). Because of His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, He alone is fit to reveal and bring to fulfillment God's great plan of redemption and renewal. (TLSB)

**5:5** *Lion of the tribe of Judah.* A Messianic title taken from Ge 49:8–10, where Judah is named a “lion’s cub” and promised the right to rule “until he comes to whom it belongs” (see also Eze 21:27). (CSB)

Messianic titles (cf. Gen. 49:8-12). (TLSB)

The elder introduces John to the victorious Lamb by the titles that describe Jesus by way of his human nature. “The Lion who is from the tribe of Judah” and “the Root of David” (5:5) refer to Christ’s human origin and descent. From the tribe of Judah the Messiah would come (Jer. 31:31; Micah 5:2 {MT 5:1}; Mt. 1:2; Heb. 7:14; 8:8), and the lion was the symbol of his messianic royal reign and power (Gen 49:8–10). He would be a direct descendant of David (2Sam. 7; Is. 11:1-10; Mt. 1:6; 9:27; 21:9; Mk. 12:35-37; Rom. 15:12), and as such would be the everlasting King upon whom all the nations would place their hope for salvation (Is 42:4; 49:1, 6). (CC pp. 136-137)

In Jewish apocalyptic thought, the Messiah is represented by and symbolized as a lion. For example, in 4 Ezra 11:36–46 the Messiah as a roaring lion will judge the ungodly in the last days but in mercy will deliver God’s people. (CC pp. 136-137)

Likewise in Jewish literature, a descendant of David would judge and save all people who would call on the Lord. For example in the Testament of Judah (24:1–6) this deliverer is called the “Shoot of God Most High,” and this Shoot would come from the root. This Shoot is also called the “Star from Jacob” and the “Sun of righteousness” (cf. Num 24:17; Mal 4:1–3; see also the Testament of Levi 18:1–5). In Psalms of Solomon (17:21–26), the son of David will rule over Israel and in wisdom and righteousness will judge the sinners, but he will gather God’s people and will lead them in righteousness. (CC pp. 136-137)

*Root of David.* See Isa 11:1, 10, which looks forward to the ideal king in the line of David. The title is interpreted Messianically in Ro 15:12. (CSB)

Thus these two titles from the OT, “the Lion who is from the tribe of Judah” and “Root of David” (Rev 5:5), influenced both Judaism and early Christianity in their respective messianic thoughts and hopes. The Jewish Christian apostles, however, had the advantage over Judaism, for they recognized Jesus of Nazareth as this Lion of Judah and Root of David. Before the birth of Jesus, Jewish people could only recognize the Christ prophetically; after the coming of Jesus of Nazareth many of them failed to see him as such. But Paul and John and others did. Paul recognized Jesus Christ as the seed of David because of his resurrection (2 Tim 2:8; see also Rom 1:2–4). Peter in his sermon at Pentecost also recognized that Jesus was the seed of David because of his resurrection (Acts 2:29–32). And now John, in the vision of Christ’s enthronement, is introduced to the victorious Lamb by way of these two great messianic titles from the OT. (CC pp. 136-137)

Both expressions are OT references to the Messiah. The elder, as an agent of the Word, properly reaches back into the revealed Word in pointing to the Messiah, the incarnate Word. He also makes it clear that these OT prophecies had actually been fulfilled. (Poellot p. 84)

*has conquered* – kikao – To subdue, conquer, overcome, prevail or get the victory. (QV)

This is a favorite of John. Of the 33 times that it is used in the NT, 25 are in John’s writings. (CC p. 132)

**5:6 Lamb.**† Pictured as the sacrifice for sin (“slain”; cf. Isa 53:7; Jn 1:29, 36) and as the mighty conqueror (17:14). Revelation uses a special word for “lamb” (29 times in Revelation and only once elsewhere in the NT—Jn 21:15). In the OT lambs were sacrificial animals, by which atonement was made for the sins of the people (cf. 1Pe 1:9). “Lamb” and “Lion” (v. 5) reflect two OT traditions of the Messiah (Isa 53:7; Da 7:13–14), seemingly so contradictory that some Jews taught that there would be two Messiahs. (CSB)

This messianic Lion of Judah and Root of David has conquered, and because of his victory he has earned the right to take the scroll and open it (5:5). *He is Jesus, the Lamb who was slain (5:6). The victory is won by Christ the Lamb, in his death on the cross and his resurrection. It is a victory that is shared with his faithful followers, the people of God (e.g., 12:11).* It is a victory which determines the Christian’s life on earth (2:26). And it is the victory that guarantees life forever with God (21:7). Here in the vision of Christ’s enthronement John’s eyes are completely focused on the victorious Lamb, who is about to be received by God and about to have conferred on him the royal authority to receive the scroll. (CC p. 137)

A lambkin. – A physically full-grown lamb, still young. (CC p. 132)

*as though it had been slain.* Bearing the marks of its slaughter—he has come to power through his death. (CSB)

Recalls not only that Jesus is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) but also His resurrection. (TLSB)

By his wounds and scars he is forever known. (Stoekhardt p. 22)

Isaiah 53:5b ...and by his wounds we are healed.”

Galatians 6:17 “Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.”

*Lamb standing* – Jesus previously said that He shares a throne with His Father. Here, however, He is described as standing before God’s throne. Accordingly, many interpreters understand this scene as involving a coronation or investiture of authority. One may see here a glimpse of what occurred in heaven at Christ’s ascension. (TLSB)

The Lamb stands “in the midst of the throne and of the four winged creatures and in the midst of the elders” (5:6). As in 4:6, where the same expression is used, “in the midst” (ἐν μέσῳ) refers to the closeness of the Lamb to God and the heavenly host. Here it probably takes on more significance than merely being close or “in the immediate vicinity.” The victorious Lamb, the exalted Christ, is now near to God and the heavenly host as the center of attention and as the recipient of honor and worship (see 5:9–12). For the exalted Christ, because of his victory as the Lamb, will now rule the heavenly host, next to God the Father and by God’s authority. In particular it is from the midst (ἀνὰ μέσον) of the throne that the Lamb will care for (ποιμανεῖ) the saints in heaven and lead them to the fountains of living waters (7:17). (CC p. 137)

As the Lamb stands “in the midst” (5:6), he does so as one who has been slain—a witness to his death on the cross. But it is also a witness to his resurrection, for though once slain, he now *stands* and lives forever (Rev 1:18; Heb 9:23–28). (CC p. 137)

*seven horns.* The horn is an ancient Jewish symbol for power or strength (cf. Dt 33:17). The fourth beast of Da 7:7, 20 had ten horns (cf. Da 8:3, 5). Seven horns would symbolize full strength. (CSB)

As the victorious Lamb lives, he exercises total power on earth (cf. Mt 28:19), as symbolized by the “seven horns,” and by means of the “seven Spirits” he is omniscient, all seeing and all knowing (Rev 5:6). In the OT the “horn” is a symbol or metaphor of power on earth in human affairs. For example, in Deut 33:13–17, in reference to Joseph, the horn symbolizes his majesty and power by which he subdues the nations—most likely a reminder of his role in Egypt but now used as a metaphor for the role that his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, play (cf. 1 Ki 22:11; Ps 112:9; Zech 1:18–19). Memorable are the ten horns of the fourth beast in the vision in Dan 7:7. The number ten there suggests supreme power exercised by human beings *in human affairs*, while seven, the number of the Lamb’s horns here, points to his exercise of supreme power *over all life, human and spiritual*. The number seven suggests also that the exalted Lamb exercises this supreme authority and power through the “seven Spirits of God” (Rev 3:1; 4:5; 5:6; cf. 1:4), the Holy Spirit, for God the Father now gives his Spirit to act on behalf of the victorious Christ (cf. Zech 4:1–6). The exalted Lord Christ now exercises this supreme authority and power on behalf of God’s people, in particular as he uses this power to defend them on earth, as will be revealed in the prophetic message of chapters 6–16. The “seven horns” (5:6) are a comforting reminder to John that the Lord Christ will defend him and his faithful hearers no matter what they experience and suffer, for he is the “horn of [their] salvation” (Ps 18:2–3 [MT 18:3–4]; cf. 1 Sam 2:1; Lk 1:69). (CC pp. 137-138)

He appears here in the fullness of divine power and might. He reigns and rules over all things with his Father. (Stoekhardt p. 22)

*seven eyes* – Closely connected with the horns are the “seven eyes” (Rev 5:6), by which the exalted Lamb now knows and sees all things. In Zech 4:10 the seven eyes of Yahweh rove over the whole earth, that is, the Lord (by means of the seven eyes) sees and knows everything. In Zechariah’s vision the seven eyes are symbolized by the lampstand with its seven lamps (4:1–3), and together they represent and symbolize Yahweh’s presence by his Spirit (4:4–6). *But now this authority to oversee everything by the Holy Spirit has been given by God to the Lamb because of his victory.* On behalf of God the Father he now exercises this oversight. John would again be reminded that the Lamb does so on behalf of God’s people for their comfort and faith. This is entailed in Jesus being the “light” of the world (see Jn 1:4; 8:12; 12:35–36, 46). The seven horns and eyes thus demonstrate the close relationship between the triumphant Christ and the Holy Spirit, for in Christ’s exalted status he and the Spirit are inseparable, especially as Christ works with his church on earth through his Word and with the Spirit (Rev 2:1, 7, 11, etc.; cf. Jn 14:17; 20:22; Rev 4:5). (CC p. 138)

*seven spirits.*† See NIV text note and notes on 1:4; 4:5. (CSB)

**5:7 took the scroll** – Investing Him as the glorified Son of Man (TLSB)

Jesus Christ as the Lamb comes to God on his throne and takes from him the seven-sealed scroll. This presentation before God recalls the presentation of the Son of Man before the Ancient of Days in Dan 7:13–14. The Son of Man approached the Ancient of Days and was presented to him. He then was given authority and glory and power over all peoples and nations, and his dominion would be an everlasting reign. Here in Revelation John sees the Lamb approach the heavenly throne and receive from God the seven-sealed scroll. What are the contents of the scroll, and what does the action of receiving and opening the scroll signify? (CC pp. 137-138)

John wept when no one was found worthy to open the scroll, because he sensed that the scroll was about the destiny of God's people. It becomes evident, as the Lamb opens each seal, that *the content of the scroll is the message that is prophetically made known to John*. That is, the contents of the scroll is the message of Revelation (6:1–22:5). The message of the scroll has to do with events on earth from the time of Christ's victory and ascension to the end of all earthly things. The prophetic message of Revelation is about the tribulation and suffering that the human race, including the church, will experience, from the ascension of Christ up to the end of this world. *But the most important part of the message concerns Christ's present and future reign in glory and the current faith and mission of the church in the midst of all the agony and death throes of the human race and its history*. As each seal of the scroll is opened in turn, the panorama of earthly events, together with Christ's reign with his people, will be poignantly displayed, beginning with 6:1 and continuing through 22:5. The first six seals control 6:1–7:17, and the seventh seal controls 8:1–22:5. *The ultimate purpose of Christ receiving the scroll and then revealing its contents to John and the church is to strengthen the church's faith and to encourage the church, in the midst of all the sufferings, to remain faithful to Christ and so to attain the promise of everlasting glory. That faithfulness involves carrying out the mission Christ has given to her*. The receiving and opening of the scroll *does* involve the destiny of the church, God's people—her suffering, mission, faith, hope, and ultimate glory with the reigning Christ. The destiny of God's people is also to witness triumphantly, certain of the final outcome at Christ's return (e.g., 14:1–15:4). Thus the destiny of the whole human race and all history is involved as well, for that destiny is and will be determined by the reception or rejection of the church's witness to the Lord Christ. *The entire destiny of the church, of the human race, and of all history is thus revealed as the scroll is opened—not as a blueprint or a time schedule of human history, but rather as a visionary, prophetic picture of the times from the ascension of Christ to the eschaton*. And it is all under the lordship of Jesus Christ, for the glory of God and for the benefit of his people. (CC pp. 137-138)

Thus the action of the Lamb receiving the scroll from God is of great importance and is laden with meaning for John and the church. Someone had to be in charge of opening the scroll if the human race's destiny was not only to be revealed but also controlled and was to have any hope for the future. The point is emphatically made to John in 5:3 that *no one anywhere* could receive the scroll and dominate its contents. No evil force, no creature, angelic or otherwise, no human, and certainly not human history and ambitions, could claim authority to receive the scroll. Only the chosen one of God, the Lamb, could do so. This means first of all that the entire destiny of the human race and its history is under the lordship and control of Jesus Christ. Humanity is *not* under the guidance of some mindless evolutionary force and is not subject to the ambitions and works of people, but rather it is under the will and power of God as now exercised by Jesus Christ. The governance of humanity and humanity's history and ultimate conclusion are under the control of God—his judgment and his love. (CC pp. 137-138)

In receiving the scroll the Lord Christ received from God the authority (1) to reveal to John and the church the prophetic message of the scroll; (2) as Lord to control and dominate everything in it; and (3) to judge humanity and the events revealed. He earned and merited the right to be the Lord and judge of all human events and history by the shedding of his blood and by his victorious resurrection. As the Savior of the world, who died for all, Christ alone determines and will continue to determine the outcome of human history. He also is the one who dominates all evil, and he will control it for the benefit of the church and her mission. Finally at the End, he will judge the evil and deliver his suffering bride. *The Lord Christ thus rules everything on behalf of his heavenly Father and for the benefit of his church, so that she will be protected in faith and hope and will be enabled to carry out her mission unto the End*. (CC pp. 137-138)

Jesus Christ as the Lamb comes to God on his throne and takes from him the seven-sealed scroll. This presentation before God recalls the presentation of the Son of Man before the Ancient of Days in Dan 7:13–14. The Son of Man approached the Ancient of Days and was presented to him. He then was given authority and glory and power over all peoples and nations, and his dominion would be an everlasting reign. Here in Revelation John sees the Lamb approach the heavenly throne and receive from God the seven-sealed scroll. What are the contents of the scroll, and what does the action of receiving and opening the scroll signify? (CC pp. 137-138)

Finally, the event of the Lamb receiving the scroll is the *coronation* of Jesus Christ as the King of kings and Lord of lords (cf. 19:16). It is his exaltation to the right hand of God in order now to rule everything on behalf of his heavenly Father. It is the enthronement of God's holy Son, who not long before hung on a cross. It is the beginning of the everlasting reign of God's righteousness through his exalted Son, a reign that will be consummated at the resurrection and in the new heaven and earth (20:11–21:7).

**5:8-14** When the Lamb had thus taken the scroll and had been enthroned at the right of God (cf. 7:9; 22:1–3), the heavenly host (as represented by the four winged creatures and the twenty-four elders) fell before the Lamb. The elders made preparation to worship him with harps and golden censer-like bowls full of incense. The censers of incense symbolize the prayers of the saints as they rise to the throne of God. In Ps 141:2 (LXX 140:2), the psalmist asks God to receive his prayer as incense. In Lk 1:8–10 Zechariah in the temple offers up incense as the people outside are praying. The practice of offering up incense thus goes back to the OT (see also Ex 30:1–8). Here in Rev 5:8 the elders offer to God the prayers of the saints as they prepare to sing their hymn attended by the harps. Whether the four winged creatures also have harps and censers of incense is not clear, but most likely they join in the praise of the Lamb. In Jewish tradition angels were looked upon as intermediaries who offered up the prayers of God's people before his heavenly throne (see Tobit 12:11–15; 3 Baruch 11:3–9). Possibly the four winged creatures also have harps and censers of the prayers, for an angel does offer before God's throne the incense and prayers of the saints (Rev 8:3). However this might be, the prayers of God's people are a fragrant part of the worship as the heavenly host begin their hymn of praise to the Lamb. (CC pp. 140-141)

**5:8** *fell down*.† The same type of devotion by the same ones is offered to Jesus as to God (4:10). Cf. Jn 5:23. (CSB)

By its reaction, the heavenly court affirms that the glorified Lord Jesus is worthy to be installed into His new capacity. (TLSB)

*harp*. An ancient stringed instrument (not the large modern harp) used especially to accompany songs (Ps 33:2). (CSB)

*bowls full of incense*. The bowl was a flat, shallow cup. Incense was a normal feature of Hebrew ritual (see Dt 33:10; cf. Ps 141:2; Rev 8:3–4). (CSB)

The centers of incense symbolize the prayers of the saints as they rise to the throne of God. In Ps. 141:2, the psalmist asks God to receive his prayer as incense. In Lk 1:8-10 Zechariah in the temple offers up incense as the people outside are praying. The practice of offering up incense thus goes back to the OT (Ex. 30:1-8). (CC p. 141)

*prayers of the saints.* In later Jewish thought, angels often present the prayers of saints to God (Tobit 12:15; 3 Baruch 11). (CSB)

**5:9** *new song.*† Cf. 14:3; Ps 33:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; Isa 42:10. In the OT a new song celebrated a new act of divine deliverance or blessing, always referring to the salvation God is preparing for his people. That is also its sense here; notice the theme of the song. (CSB)

Christians throughout the ages have joined in the celestial singing described here. In our generation, numerous Lutheran hymnals have a musical setting that includes the very words of this canticle (e.g., “This is the Feast,” LSB 155). (TLSB)

With the singing of the hymn of praise to the Lamb “we enter into one of the greatest scenes of universal adoration anywhere recorded.” In fact, we can even say that *this scene of adoration of the Lamb is the greatest such scene in all of the biblical writings, for it is through the worship of the Lord Christ that the heavenly Father receives his highest glory from his saints* (cf. Jn 5:23; 8:54). (CC pp. 141-142)

The hymn or ode of praise is called a “*new song*” (Rev 5:9). In 14:3 the church militant, as represented by the 144,000, sing something akin to the “*new song*” as they follow the Lamb, indicating that the worship and praise of God’s people on earth is parallel to that of the saints in heaven before God and reaches toward it. In 15:3 the church on earth, as she is in deadly conflict with the beast, sings “the song of Moses . . . and the hymn of the Lamb.” In contrast to the “*new song*,” the song of Moses and the Lamb is a hymn of victorious hope in the midst of conflict; it voices the assurance of victory here on earth despite the suffering caused by the beast. The new song, on the other hand, voices the peace of the ultimate victory in God’s presence in heaven. The song of Moses and the Lamb also expresses the rightness of God’s actions in showing his anger and judgment on earth toward the beast and his evil forces. (CC pp. 141-142)

Here in 5:9 the hymn of adoration addressed to the Lamb is “*new*” because it has never been sung before. Unlike the song of Moses and the Lamb, it contains no direct OT quotes. The stanzas of the new song (5:9–10, 12–13) echo the stanza in 4:11 and thus join the new song to the great Te Deum begun in 4:8 and continued in 4:11. Added in 5:9–10 and 5:12 are stanzas that celebrate the victory and enthronement of the Lamb. While such a hymn might have been sung before, it would have only been in anticipation. Now it is sung because the promise has been fulfilled, for the Christ has come and has won the victory for God and his people. The hymn itself expresses why the Lamb is worthy to receive “[all] the power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing” (5:12): he ransomed for God with his blood a people from all quarters of the human race (5:9). (CC pp. 141-142)

adousin – They began to sing and continued to do so without ceasing. (CC p. 133)

*with your blood you purchased men.* The sacrificial death of Christ is central to NT teaching (see Mk 10:45; 1Co 6:20). (CSB)

**5:10** *kingdom and priests.* These people purchased by Christ are now the “*kingdom*” of God and serve as his “*priests*” on earth (5:10). The royal priesthood of all believers is a royal-priestly reign of God’s kingdom here on earth in which his people are involved. The fact that his people fulfill their royal reign as priests suggests that the purpose of God’s kingdom on earth is an intercessory one. That is, through the proclamation of the redemptive victory of the Lamb, God’s royal priests on earth hold up before his heavenly throne the atonement or blood covering (ἱλαστήριον, Rom 3:25; Heb 9:5; ἱλασμός, 1Jn 2:2; 4:10), as they point people through it to the mercy of God (see 1

Pet 2:5–9). Already Rev 1:6, part of the trinitarian imprimatur, makes this important identification of God’s people as “a kingdom, priests.” Rev 20:6 again mentions this royal priesthood as a description of the role of the church in the millennial reign of Christ on earth. The fact that this note of God’s people as his royal priests (5:10) is a part of the hymn which glorifies the Lamb demonstrates that they have this role because of Christ and that God honors his people as such. *For the royal priesthood of God’s saints is an image, a living picture of the royal priesthood of Christ, a priesthood for the salvation of all people by his own blood and through the proclamation of the Gospel* (cf. Heb 4:14–5:10; 9:11–28; 10:19–25). And this priestly reign of God’s people on earth is not some future happening, but it is active *now* through the proclamation of God’s Word (see Rev 10:11). *The royal priestly reign of Christ, the kingdom of God, is not some future event but is present now, though its present and future glory and its manifestation to the human race are not yet visible, for the reign of Christ is seen now only through faith.* (CC p. 142)

*reign on the earth.* † See 2:26–27; 20:4, 6; 22:5. (Cf. note on 3:21.) Not a reference to any millennial reign, for the reign of God’s people on the new earth will last forever, not for only a thousand years. “His kingdom will never end” (Lk 1:33). (CSB)

Luther: “All Christians are priests in equal degree” (AE 40:21). (TLSB)

**5:11** *myriads and myriads and thousands upon thousands.* A rhetorical phrase for an indefinitely large number (see Da 7:10; cf. Heb 12:22). (CSB)

A myriad is ten thousand. Thus, the angels number in the millions. (TLSB)

Though the hymn of praise is begun by the four winged creatures and by the twenty-four elders, all the heavenly host of angels joins in this acclamation of the Lamb (5:11–12). The whole heavenly host, saints in representative fashion and all the angels, worships and adores the Lamb now enthroned at the right of the Father. All the glory and honor and worship that was given to God the Creator (4:11) is now given in equal manner to the victorious and elevated Christ (5:12). (CC pp. 142-143)

When all these saints shall once be gathered in heaven, they shall together constitute a great people, and they will then with united voices praise the Lamb and give him glory and honor. He has brought all things to a glorious conclusion conducting them safely through all tribulation and making them his holy people in heaven. (Stoekhardt p. 23)

Common Preface – It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to you, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who on this day overcame death and the grave and by his glorious resurrection opened to us the way of everlasting life. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying: Sanctus – Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of Sabaoth. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he, blessed is he, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest.

**5:12** *worthy is the Lamb* – Christ deserves the wealth of all honor, embodied here in seven aspects symbolizing fullness. Because John records the very words of the angelic worship, the earthly Church is able to join in “with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven” (LSB Altar Book, p. 161). (TLSB)

When comparing the two stanzas of praise, the first to God the Creator (4:11) and the second to the Lamb (5:12), one finds that the same ascriptive words of praise are used in both: “glory” (δόξα), “honor” (τιμὴ), and “power” (δύναμις). But to the Christ further words of praise are ascribed: “wealth” (πλοῦτος), “wisdom” (σοφία), “strength” (ἰσχύς), and “blessing” (εὐλογία). These additional words of worship and praise are given to the Son of God because he merited and earned them in his earthly life of humiliation, suffering and death, and by his glorious resurrection. Because he is the Savior of the human race, God’s saints laud him, for Jesus Christ is the wealth, the wisdom, the strength, and the blessing of God. In his creative activity God is the glory and honor and power of his people, but this creative activity of his glory and honor and power can be seen now in full measure only through Jesus Christ as his followers recognize and see in him the wealth and wisdom and strength and blessing of God. And it is also through Christ’s wealth and wisdom and strength and blessing that God’s people receive from God the gift of salvation and the gifts of his creative activity, now because of and through the proclamation of the Gospel. Then in worship of God through the Christ the saints give it all back to God and his Christ in acknowledgement that everything comes from God and belongs to him. (CC p. 143)

### **The Lamb of God - Excurses**

The Lamb of God is a beautiful concept that is derived from the OT. Perhaps there is no other description or title of Jesus Christ that so touches the heart of the Christian. Related to it is the idea that Jesus Christ is also the Good Shepherd. Because Jesus was the Lamb of God who was sacrificed for the sins of the people, he became as a result their Shepherd. It is not by accident that the twenty-third psalm is possibly the single most quoted chapter of the Bible, for it prophetically draws together what Christ means to his followers. John in his gospel relates to us how John the Baptist pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29). John’s gospel also describes how Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10). Jesus became the Good Shepherd by laying down his life for the sheep (Jn 10:11). In Revelation Jesus is referred to as both the Lamb of God and as the Shepherd of God’s people (7:17).

Both motifs, the Lamb of God and the Good Shepherd, are deeply embedded in the OT. According to the author of Hebrews, the lambs (also bulls and rams) prescribed for sacrifice in the OT were examples or patterns (ὑποδείγματα, Heb 9:23) of the sacrifice of Christ’s death (Heb 9:6–10:18). Peter says that Christ, as a blameless and spotless Lamb, redeemed God’s people by his blood (1 Pet 1:18–20). That brings to mind the kinds of lambs that were required for sacrifice in the OT (Lev 3:1–2, 7–8; 4:32–34; Num 6:12). Isaiah prophetically describes how the Suffering Servant carried the guilt of the sheep who had gone astray and was thus led like a lamb to the slaughter (Is 53:5–7; cf. also Jer 11:19). Ezekiel speaks of Yahweh becoming the Shepherd of his scattered sheep (Ezek 34:11–16), and how he will do this by placing over his flock one Shepherd, his Servant, a new David, who would tend and lead the sheep. Thus Yahweh will save his flock (Ezek 34:22–24; cf. Is 40:10–11; Micah 5:2–4 [MT 5:1–3]). Throughout the OT God was thus looked upon as the Shepherd of his people (Gen. 48:15-16; 1 Chr. 11:1-2; Ps. 28:9; 78:52, 70-72; 80:1-2 {MT 80:2-3}; Jer. 31:1-11; Micah 7:14). (CC pp. 148-149)

In particular, the Passover lamb played an important role in the liturgical and devotional life of the people of the OT. The sacrifice of the lamb and the eating of it initiated the Passover festival. The lamb had to be a year-old male and without defect (Ex 12:5; Num 28:19). Before the first Passover meal was eaten the blood of the lamb had to be smeared on the doorframes of the house. The Passover sacrifice and meal were celebrated in commemoration of the deliverance from slavery in Egypt. On the night of the first Passover, as the Passover lamb was eaten, the Lord destroyed the firstborn sons of Egypt. But he passed over the houses of the Israelites because of

the blood of the lambs smeared on the doorframes of their homes (Ex. 12:1-30; Num. 9:1-14; Deut. 16:1-8; 2 Chr. 35:1-19). (CC pp. 148-149)

The slaying of the firstborn sons of the Egyptians and the redemption of the firstborn sons of the Israelites (Ex 13:1–16) could have been a picture of God’s promised sacrifice of his own Son for the redemption of the world (see also Gen 22:1–18). Such an explicit connection is made in the NT. Paul in 1 Cor 5:7 says that Christ is the sacrificed Passover Lamb. And in the accounts of the Passover meal before Christ’s death, there is an apparent connection between Christ’s body and blood and his coming death, and the Passover lamb whose blood was shed (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20). Apart from Paul, however, no other NT author explicitly calls Christ the Passover Lamb, but the fact that Paul does so—and does so without explanation—seems to imply that such a connection was widely known. Certainly it was known to the early church fathers, for they often saw in the Passover lamb a type of the sacrifice of Christ. (CC pp. 148-149)

Of NT authors, John makes the most use of the concept of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God. The OT picture of the lamb and its shed blood introduces Jesus to the public at his baptism (Jn 1:29, 36). John emphasizes the blood and water from Jesus’ side at his death (Jn 19:34). In 1 Jn 1:7–9, the blood of Jesus cleanses the sins of those who confess. Together with the water and the Spirit, the blood testifies that Jesus is God’s Son (1 Jn 5:5–9). And in Revelation it is the picture of the Lamb who was slain that is used to introduce the Lord Christ at his presentation to God on his heavenly throne (5:6, 9, 12–13), and it is by the blood of the Lamb that the saints of God also stand before his heavenly Father (7:13–17). (CC pp. 148-149)

*While the Christology of Revelation deals primarily with the exaltation of Jesus Christ and his glorious reign, the foundation for this exalted Christology is the theology of the Lamb of God, who suffered and died and rose again. By this suffering, death, and victory he merited the eternal glory of his Father, the glory he now shares with his people. Throughout Revelation the exalted Christ is the focus of the prophetic message. But also throughout the message of Revelation there is a constant reminder that Jesus Christ is the exalted Son of Man and Lord of lords and King of kings because he was and is the Lamb of God, who was sacrificed for the sins of God’s people. (Rev. 1:18; 2:8; 5:6-13; 6:1, 16; 7:9-17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1-5, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:6-9; 21:9, 22-27; 22:1-3) (CC pp. 148-149)*

*power ... blessing!* See David’s farewell prayer in 1Ch 29:10–19. The attributes increase from three in 4:9–11 to four in 5:13 to seven in 5:12; 7:12. – The Lamb is the one worthy of all the power and praise of heaven because he fully accepted his assignment from the Father and was obedient, even unto death. (CSB)

**5:13** *heaven ... earth ... under the earth.* Depicts the fulfillment of the prophecy that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Phil. 2:10). (TLSB)

And so all creation renders equal praise to both God on his throne and to the Lamb with the ascriptive words of “[all] the blessing and the honor and the glory and the dominion [κράτος]” (5:13). Finally then, all the ascriptive words of worship and praise are given equally to God and to the Lamb, all except “wisdom” and “wealth,” which remain alone with the Lord Christ. (CC pp. 143-144)

Jesus Christ is both “the Word” (ὁ λόγος, Jn 1:1) and “the Wisdom” (ἡ σοφία) of God (1 Cor 1:21). While the *creative power* of God can be discerned in the things he has made (the natural revelation of God, Rom 1:18–23) so that people should honor and glorify God (Rom. 1:21; cf. Job 12:7-10; Ps. 4:2{MT 4:3}; 19:1 {MT 19:2} 97:6-7; 148:1-12), God’s *Word* is *incarnate* and

his *Wisdom* is *embodied* and recognized only (by faith) in Jesus Christ. This is especially seen to be true when wisdom is connected with wealth. Wealth (πλοῦτος) in this context refers to spiritual, not material, wealth. It sums up everything that Christ has done to redeem and save the human race. *It is only in Christ that the human race receives and acknowledges the “wealth” of God’s saving grace, and it is only in the Lord Christ that the “wisdom” of God is received and acknowledged, especially that wisdom which leads the human heart in repentance to a saving faith.* Thus “wisdom” and “wealth” are credited alone to Jesus Christ, for these cannot be seen or received by way of the “natural knowledge” of God but only through the knowledge of and faith in Jesus Christ. (CC pp. 143-144)

**5:14** Except for the One on the throne (the Father; v. 1) and the sevenfold Spirit (v. 6) everyone in heaven and earth is worshiping Jesus. (TLSB)

The four winged creatures conclude the stanzas of this great Te Deum, the “new song” (5:9) of praise to the Lamb and to God for the salvation of God’s people (5:9–10, 12–13), by pronouncing “amen” (5:14). The imperfect tense of λέγω (ἔλεγον, “saying,” 5:14) suggests that, as the heavenly hosts were singing the new stanza of the Te Deum, the four winged creatures were continually saying or singing “amen.” But especially at the end does their “amen” ring out in affirmation, “This is most certainly true.” As the four creatures initiated the great Te Deum with the Trisagion (ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος; *Ter Sanctus*) in 4:8, so now they conclude this stanza with the affirming “amen.” The heavenly hosts, both saints and angels, under the direction of the choir masters (the four winged creatures), thus voice this mighty hymn to God, their Creator and to the victorious Lamb. But it is in particular the *saints of God*, as represented by the twenty-four elders, who, at the crescendo of the four winged creatures’ “amen,” conclude the worship of God as their Savior in Christ by falling down before him (5:14). (CC pp. 144-147)

### **The Enthronement and the Celebration**

This glorious vision of God’s heavenly majesty and the coronation and enthronement of Jesus Christ are among the most beautiful chapters in the entire Bible. Revelation 4 and 5 picture the end result of God’s creation and in particular God’s redemption and restoration of the human race through his Son, Jesus Christ. This is where the whole story of God’s revelation to humanity ends: before his heavenly throne, under the reign of Jesus Christ. For the whole purpose of God’s activity toward all peoples and his creation is that it all would end in the worship and praise of God as the Creator and Savior through his Son (See Jn. 14:1-3; 17:24; Eph. 2:1-7; Phil. 1:21-23; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Peter 1:3-9). The actual conclusion to this heavenly vision is when the new heaven and earth have come about at the resurrection in the End (20:11–22:5). (CC pp. 144-147)

When did the enthronement of Jesus Christ, pictured in Revelation 4–5, take place? The best answer appears to be that it took place at the ascension of the Lord Christ for the following reasons. It is certain that it took place after the suffering and death and resurrection of Jesus, for the victorious Lamb appears in the scene as one who has been slain but now is alive (5:6). The Scriptures reveal that Jesus Christ would come into his heavenly glory after his resurrection. In his intercessory prayer for his disciples (John 17), Jesus prays that finally they might be with him to see his glory—a reference to his glory at the right hand of God in his heavenly majesty (Jn 17:24). In the accounts of the transfiguration, the glory of the Christ which was displayed was the glory that he would come into after his death and resurrection (see especially Lk 9:31–32). Just before Stephen was led away to his martyrdom, he looked into heaven by the Spirit and saw Jesus Christ in glory at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55–56). According to Peter, the exaltation of Jesus at the right hand of God was after the resurrection and before the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, that is, at his ascension (Acts 2:32–35; cf. Jn 7:39; Acts 3:12–13). (CC pp. 144-147)

*Revelation 4 and 5 are a dramatization of the exaltation of Jesus Christ at the right hand of God, as it appeared from heaven's view.* The description of Acts 1:6–11 is from the perspective of those on earth. We thus have two complementary visual descriptions of Christ's ascension. As the disciples saw the Lord taken up from them to disappear into the heavens, at the same time Jesus was received by his heavenly Father, as pictured in Revelation 4 and 5. At his ascension he was enthroned and crowned as Lord so as to rule everything on behalf of his Father. The action of God giving the scroll to the Lamb represents this coronation and enthronement. What John sees in Revelation 4 and 5 is a reenactment of that which, in earthly time, had taken place some years before, at the Mount of Olives (Lk 24:50–51). However, the celebration that began and was initiated at the Lord's enthronement was still going on when John saw the dramatization of it. And that celebration is still going on and will continue into eternity. The vision of Christ's coronation at his ascension in Revelation 4 and 5 is given as if it were in the Greek perfect tense. What John saw actually happened in the past, but the results of that tremendous event are in the present and extend into the future. Christ's exaltation as Lord continues, as does also the celebration with the singing of the "new song" in the Te Deum, for that "new song" is ever new and the One it celebrates is ever present with his church. (CC pp. 144-147)

There has never been a celebration like that which began when the Son returned to his heavenly Father. For some two thousand years it has been taking place, and it will continue forever. Heaven broke into joyful song and celebration when the Son came back victorious. He was received by the Father and was given the authority, then and up to the End, to rule everything on behalf of God (see 1 Cor 15:20–28). But one can imagine how, not long before this, all heaven was in mourning when the Son was crowned with thorns and placed on a cross—witness the darkness that came over the face of the earth (Mk 15:33). In reality Jesus' coronation, by which he created a kingdom for God and by which he himself became a king, was at his suffering and death (see Jn 12:27–33; Rev 5:9–10). But while his kingship was earned in his suffering and death, it would be a kingdom and a reign in glory. The crown of thorns gave way to a crown of many diadems (Rev 19:11–14; cf. Mt 26:63–64). The glory of the cross is now fully seen in the glory of the exaltation of Christ at the right hand of God in his heavenly majesty. Heaven is no longer in mourning; celebration has taken its place forever. (CC pp. 144-147)

Of the many illustrations that Jesus gave for different aspects of the kingdom of God, perhaps none better illustrates the mourning over the lost son and the celebration that takes its place at his return than that of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11–32). As the younger son in the parable, the prodigal, left his father's love and fellowship to waste his inheritance and to ruin his life, so also the Christian now recognizes that the whole human race once became lost, was in a state of ruin and subject to death. Would the heavenly Father ever receive back the son who had shamed him, denied him, disowned him? Yes he would. He does not will that the sinner die, but that he repent and live (Ezek 18:32). And so the heavenly Father has sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, on the mission of salvation. The Son of God left his heavenly Father, took the place of the prodigal, and suffered in his place. The shame and eternal ruin that was the prodigal's had now become that of Jesus. Jesus Christ is like the prodigal son in the sense that he became such in the place of the real prodigal, the human race. (CC pp. 144-147)

As he left his Father's house to undertake this task, sorrow must have filled the Father's heart and the hearts of the heavenly host. And as the Son was at the "pig's trough," the cross, that sorrow must have reached a terrible depth of agony. But when the Son finished with the suffering, heaven burst forth into a jubilation that is still ringing the rafters and the portals of God's heavenly court. The Son had come back and celebration broke out. Now the real prodigal, all people from every race and tongue, can return to the heavenly Father, knowing that they will be received because the Son of God was received. And when each individual prodigal in repentance

and faith comes to the heavenly Father, he or she will be received in joy and honor just as surely as was the Son, Jesus Christ (see Mt 18:10–14; Lk 15:7). For Christ won the victory for God’s people so that they could thus be reconciled to their Father and be received by him. (CC pp. 144-147)

### **The Enthronement and the Prophetic Message**

Finally, this vision of God’s heavenly glory and the enthronement of Jesus Christ and of the celebration begun and now ongoing not only introduces the prophetic message of Revelation, it also dominates and controls it and shows how it is all going to end. Jesus Christ is the Lord of the message. After his coronation (Revelation 4–5), he himself (6:1–7:17) introduces the message to John. (The message from 8:1 to 22:5 is *from Jesus through* angels.) And Jesus controls it for the purpose of strengthening the saints, of aiding his church to carry out her mission on earth, and of judging the powers and persons of wickedness and evil. *Everything seen and heard in the prophetic message is to be interpreted in view of this inaugural vision of Christ’s coronation, for then and only then will the individual components of the message yield their proper interpretations.* (CC pp. 144-147)

**Ch 5** The character of heavenly worship powerfully underscores the glory of Christ’s redeeming work. Apart from Him, our fallen world has no hope. However, because Jesus was slain and then conquered death, His people are ransomed and have the hope of glory. • “Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God.... Blessing, honor, glory and might be to God and the Lamb forever.” Amen. (LSB, p 155)