



THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 16

Text: Rev. 5:1-7

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1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀγίου καὶ τοῦ ἀγίου πνεύματος ἡν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἃ γενέσθαι δεῖ διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Ἰωάννη, 2 καὶ ἐποίησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀγίου καὶ τοῦ ἀγίου πνεύματος ὅσα εἶδεν. 3 Μακάρι οἱ ποιοῦν τὰς ἐντολὰς τούτων ἵνα ἔσται ἡ γεγραμμένη

QUICK LINKS

1. What the text meant.

Historical Aspects:

External History

Internal History

Literary Aspects:

Genre

Literary Setting

Literary Structure

Exegesis of the Text:

A. Who is worthy? vv. 1-5

B. The Lamb is worthy! vv. 6-7

2. What the text means.

Worthy is the Lamb

Greek NT

5.1 Καὶ εἶδον ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου βιβλίον γεγραμμένον ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν κατεσφραγισμένον σφραγίσιν ἑπτὰ. 2 καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον ἰσχυρὸν κηρύσσοντα ἐν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· τίς ἄξιος ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον καὶ λῦσαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ; 3 καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ οὐδὲ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐδὲ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον οὔτε βλέπειν αὐτό. 4 καὶ ἔκλαιον πολὺ, ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἄξιος εὐρέθη ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον οὔτε βλέπειν αὐτό. 5 καὶ εἷς ἐκ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων λέγει μοι· μὴ κλαίε, ἰδοὺ ἐνίκησεν ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰουδα, ἡ ρίζα Δαυὶδ, ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ.

6 Καὶ εἶδον ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἄρνιον ἐστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον ἔχων κέρατα ἑπτὰ καὶ ὀφθαλμοὺς ἑπτὰ οἳ εἰσὶν τὰ [ἑπτὰ] πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεσταλμένοι εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν. 7 καὶ ἦλθεν καὶ εἴληφεν ἐκ τῆς δεξιᾶς τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου.

La Biblia de las Américas

1 Y vi en la mano derecha del que estaba sentado en el trono un libro escrito por dentro y por fuera, sellado con siete sellos. 2 Y vi a un ángel poderoso que pregonaba a gran voz: ¿Quién es digno de abrir el libro y de desatar sus sellos? 3 Y nadie, ni en el cielo ni en la tierra ni debajo de la tierra, podía abrir el libro ni mirar su contenido. 4 Y yo lloraba mucho, porque nadie había sido hallado digno de abrir el libro ni de mirar su contenido. 5 Entonces uno de los ancianos me dijo: No llores; mira, el León de la tribu de Judá, la Raíz de David, ha vencido para abrir el libro y sus siete sellos.

6 Miré, y vi entre el trono (con los cuatro seres vivientes) y los ancianos, a un Cordero, de pie, como inmolido, que tenía siete cuernos y siete ojos, que son los siete Espíritus de Dios enviados por toda la tierra. 7 Y vino, y tomó el libro de la mano derecha del que estaba sentado en el trono.

NRSV

1 Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside 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 bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

6 Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne.

NLT

1 And I saw a scroll in the right hand of the one who was sitting on the throne. There was writing on the inside and the outside of the scroll, and it was sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a strong angel, who shouted with a loud voice: "Who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and unroll it?" 3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll and read it. 4 Then I wept because no one could be found who was worthy to open the scroll and read it. 5 But one of the twenty-four elders said to me, "Stop weeping! Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the heir to David's throne, has conquered. He is worthy to open the scroll and break its seven seals."

6 I looked and I saw a Lamb that had been killed but was now standing between the throne and the four living beings and among the twenty-four elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God that are sent out into every part of the earth. 7 He stepped forward and took the scroll from the right hand of the one sitting on the throne.

INTRODUCTION

The next scene of heaven focuses on the Lamb of God and His worthiness to open the seal on the scroll that God holds in His right hand. The scroll is unusual in that it has seven seals inserted inside it at different points on the scroll. The slain Lamb of God is the only one considered worthy to break the seals so that the scroll can be opened up. When the Lamb's worthiness is affirmed openly in heaven, great worship of the Lamb begins, this time not only from the four creatures and the twenty-four elders, but also from the hosts of angels in heaven as well. The sacrificial system based temple worship in Jerusalem comes dramatically to the forefront here as the earthly counterpart to worship in heaven.

What we encounter here is the first two segments of the second worship scene contained in 5:1-14. The initial worship scene chapter four established the narrative pattern of depicting deity (4:1-6a // 5:1-7) and the worship of deity by those in heaven (4:6b-11 // 5:8-14). Thus the second worship scene in chapter five follows the paradigm established in chapter four. Key to both is the concept of ἄξιός, *worthiness*, on the part of deity to merit the adoration of those in heaven. This worthiness is deemed to already exist in the being and actions of both God and the Lamb. Thus the response of worship centers on acknowledging the worthiness of deity in complete surrender to God and the Lamb.

We have so much to learn about our God and our Savior from this text! Then this informs and structures our worship of Him, which we will examine in study 17.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

The apocalyptic visionary nature of this text limits the historical aspects somewhat, although some historical background is important to understand since the visionary depiction draws imagery from the historical background for communicating meaning to the vision. The literary aspects play the dominant role here because of the atypical nature of apocalyptic visions. Some important genre issues will emerge here that will influence the direction of interpretation.

Historical Aspects:

External History. In the history of the hand copying of this passage only one variation in reading surfaces among the existing manuscripts that the editors of The Greek New Testament (UBS 4th rev. ed.) considered significant enough to impact the translation of the text.

This variation occurs in verse six with the word ἑπτὰ, *seven*, in the

phrase τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ, *the seven spirits of God*.¹ The external manuscript evidence is rather evenly balanced both for and against the inclusion of the number seven.² Likewise the transcriptional internal evidence goes both ways as well. Consequently the UBS editors opted to include the number but enclose it in brackets to signal high level uncertainty over its inclusion.³

The *Novum Testamentum Graece*

¹{C} τὰ ἑπτὰ P²⁴ x 1854 2053 2329 (2344 omit τὰ) 2351 Byz [046] it^{sig} vg^{cl} syr^{ph, h} cop^{sa, bo} arm eth Irenaeus^{lat} Clement^{vid} Hippolytus; Cyprian Maternus Tyconius Gregory-Elvira Fulgentius Primasius Beatus // τὰ A P^{vid} 205 209 1006 1611 1841 2053 it^{ar} vg^{ww, st} Irenaeus^{arm} Andrew; Apringius

[Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus)*; *The Greek New Testament, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus)* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

²“The evidence for the presence of ἑπτὰ before πνεύματα (P²⁴ x 046 1854 2053 2344 2432 it^{sig} syr^{ph, h} cop^{sa, bo} arm Hippolytus al) is fairly evenly balanced against the evidence for its absence (A P^{vid} 1 1006 1611 itar vg eth Irenaeus^{arm} al). From the transcriptional point of view, through confusion with the two previous instances of ἑπτὰ in the preceding line, the word may have been accidentally omitted. On the other hand, copyists may have inserted the numeral in imitation of 1:4; 3:1; 4:5. In order to represent the ambiguities of external and internal considerations, the Committee decided to print the word, but to enclose it within square brackets, thus indicating doubt whether it belongs in the text.” [Bruce Manning Metzger, United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 666.]

³“The variant reading has little significance for translation, since the number “seven” is implied in the variant reading. Beale (*The Book of Revelation*, p. 356) correctly writes, ‘the meaning remains unchanged even if ‘seven’ is omitted, since ‘the spirits’ are clearly to be identified with the ‘seven spirits’ in chs. 1, 3, and 4.’ The manuscript evidence for the presence of ἑπτὰ before πνεύματα (spirits) is fairly evenly balanced against the manuscript evidence for its absence. It is possible that ἑπτὰ was accidentally omitted through confusion with the two previous occurrences of the word in this verse. On the other hand, copyists may have inserted the number in imitation of 1:4; 3:1; 4:5. In order to represent the ambiguities of external and internal considerations, ἑπτὰ has been put in brackets to indicate uncertainty regarding the original text.

“The Greek is ambiguous and may seem to say that the seven spirits refer to both the seven horns and the seven eyes. But the ‘seven spirits’ refer only to the seven eyes; and the background is Zech 4:10, which speaks of the ‘seven eyes of the LORD which range through the whole earth.’ Compare REB: ‘He had seven horns and seven eyes, the eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent to every part of the world’.”

[Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 531.]



(UBS 27th rev. ed.), on the other hand, lists some 22 places where variations of readings surface in this passage.⁴ But apart from the one instance addressed by the UBS *Greek New Testament* apparatus, the others represent either attempts at stylistic improvement or careless copying mistakes. None of them impact the meaning of the text.

Consequently we can exegete the adopted reading of the text in full confidence that it represents the exact wording of the original writing.

⁴Offenbarung 5,1

* εσ. κ. εἴωθεν *M* latt sy^{ph} bo (ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν is either replaced or highly modified)

| εμπροσθεν κ. οπ. κ pc sa; Or

| txt A 2329. 2344 pc sy^h; Cyp

* κα' κ' pc sy^{ph} bo; Or (καὶ is inserted before κατεσφραγισμένον)

Offenbarung 5,2

* 1611. 1854 *M*^A (ἐν is omitted)

* εστιν 1006. 1841 *M*^K sy^h (ἔστιν is inserted before ἀνοίξει)

Offenbarung 5,3

* ανω 1006. 1841. 2351 *M*^K sy^h (ἄνω is inserted before οὐδὲ)

* bis ουτε (κ) 2050. 2329. 2351 *M*^K (οὐδὲ is replaced by οὔτε)

* κ 1854. 2344 t (the οὐδὲ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς is omitted)

* ουδε 1611. 2053 *M*^A (οὔτε is replaced by οὐδὲ)

Offenbarung 5,4

* vs A 1854. 2050. 2329 pc (καὶ is omitted)

* εγω εκλ. πολυ 1006. 1611^c. 1841. 2351 *M*^K lat; Cyp (ἔκλαιον πολὺ is replaced by one of these alternatives)

| εκλ. πολλοι 2053. 2344 pc bo

* και αναγνωσαι 2050 pc (καὶ ἀναγῶναι is inserted before τὸ βιβλίον)

Offenbarung 5,5

* κ 1006. 1611. 1841. 2053. 2329 pc (ὁ before ἐκ is omitted)

* ο ανοιγων 2351 *M*^K sy^h (ἀνοίξει is replaced by ὁ ἀνοίγων)

* λυσαι κ 2344 pc vg^{cl} sy^{ph}; Apr (λύσαι is inserted before τὰς ἐπτὰ)

Offenbarung 5,6

* ιδου και Α (εἶδον is replaced by one of these three alternatives)

| ειδον και ιδου 1006. 1841 pc lat

| ειδον και 1611. 2053

* -κως κ 2050 al (ἔστηκός is replaced by ἔστηκώς)

*¹ εχον *M* (ἔχων is replaced by ἔχον)

| txt P²⁴ κ A 046. 1006. 2050. 2329. 2351 pc

*² α 1854. 2050. 2329. 2344. 2351 *M*^K (οἱ is replaced by ἃ)

* A 1006. 1611. 1841. 2050 *M*^A ar vg; Ir^{arm} (ἐπτὰ is omitted)

| txt P²⁴ κ 1854. 2053. 2329. 2344. 2351 *M*^K it vgcl sy; Ir^{lat}

Hipp Cyp

*³ -να κ 1854. 2050 pc (ἀπεσταλμένοι is replaced by one of these three alternative spellings)

| τα -να 1006. 1841. 2329 *M*^A

| αποστελλομενα (1611). 2351 *M*^K

| txt A 2053; Ir^{lat}

Offenbarung 5,7

* το βιβλιον 1006. 1841. 2050 pc it vgcl sy^{ph}.h** co; Cyp Prim (τὸ βιβλίον after εἴληφεν as the direct object)

| την 046

[Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 641–642.]

Internal History. In the internal history background stand some references to concrete items such as a scroll with seals and a throne. An important interpretive question must be addressed in terms of what image came to mind by those first readers and hearers of this text in the late 90s living in the Roman province of Asia?

The image of a scroll is helpful to explore since scrolls are hardly a part of the modern world. One of the real challenges to the picture of a scroll painted here by John is his use of βιβλίον γεγραμμένον ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν, a scroll written on the inside and at the back. The problem here is that the two adverbs are not natural opposites. In ancient Greek, one would have expected ἔσωθεν καὶ ἔξωθεν, inside and outside, signaling that both side of the papyrus



scroll contained writing. This very unusual combination of adverbs prompted numerous copyists to alter the reading, as the footnote under external history above illustrates. The alternative patterns follow either ἔσωθεν καὶ ἔξωθεν, inside and outside, with manuscripts m latt sy^{ph} bo. Or else, ἐμπρόσθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν, front side and back side, in κ pc sa; Origen. But the greater weight of manuscript evidence favors the reading ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν, inside and back side.⁵ The picture of the scroll

⁵“Variants: (1) ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν] A (lacuna in C) fam 1611 2329 2344 Oecumenius²⁰⁶² Andr a b e²⁰⁵⁷ f syr^h Origen (Comm. in Jo. 5.6; ed. Preuschen, Origenes Werke, 103, 28) Cyprian Epiphanius TR; Tischendorf, *NT Graece*; WHort; von Soden, *Text*; Merk, *NT*; Nestle-Aland²⁷; UBSGNT⁴; TCGNT¹: Charles, 2:267; G. Reichelt, Buch, 80–91. (2) ἐμπροσθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν] κ Andr f²⁰³¹ cop^{sa} Origen. (3) ἔσωθεν καὶ ἔξωθεν] 025 046 fam 1006 fam 1611^{1611 1854 2050} Oecumenius^{2053 2351} Andreas Byzantine it^{sig} vg syr^{ph} arm cop^{bo} Hippolytus (Comm. in Dan. 4.34); Bousset (1906) 254; Roller, ZNW 36 (1937) 98–99; Staritz, ZNW 30 (1931) 158–59; Holtz, Christologie, 32. (4) ἔξωθεν καὶ ἔσωθεν] 94.

“Extensive discussion of these variants occurs in Zahn, 1:328–31; G. Reichelt, Buch, 80–91. Reading (1) is awkward because of the juxtaposition of ἔσωθεν and ὀπισθεν, which are not opposites, for the first adv means ‘within, on the inside’ (Louw-Nida, § 83.16), while the second means ‘the back of,’ ‘[from] behind,’ or ‘on the back’ (Louw-Nida, § 83.41). Variants (2), (3), and (4) are all attempts to correct the awkward juxtaposition of these two adverbs. Variant (2) has ‘in front and behind’ (influenced by the identical phrase in 4:6) and also reverses the advs. found in LXX Ezekel 2:10, which may have influenced the wording of this variant. Variant (3) has ‘inside and outside’ (this pair of antonyms occurs in Luke 11:40; 2 Cor 7:5), and variant (4) has ‘outside and inside.’ Zahn favors reading (1), because he takes ὀπισθεν not with ἔσωθεν

here echoes that in Ezekiel 2:9-10.

9 και εἶδον και ἰδοῦ χειρ ἐκτεταμένη πρὸς με, και ἐν αὐτῇ κεφαλῆς βιβλίου· † 10 και ἀνείλησεν αὐτὴν ἐνώπιον ἐμοῦ, και ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα ἦν τὰ ὀπισθεν και τὰ ἔμπροσθεν, και ἐγγράπτο εἰς αὐτὴν θρῆνος και μέλος και οὐαί. †

9 I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. 10 He spread it before me; it **had writing on the front and on the back**, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe.

Although absolute certainty cannot be reached, the more likely understanding is that this scroll is an ὀπισθόγραφος category of ancient papyrus scroll with writing on both sides of the papyrus.⁶ But the image

but with the following phrase, which results in this translation: ‘a book written within and sealed on the back side with seven seals’ (Zahn, 1:327–34). For Zahn, the βιβλίον is therefore a codex (i.e., a book with pages), not a scroll. Birt regards Zahn’s view as impossible (Buchrolle, 86 n. 2). The main problem with this way of construing the sentence is the clear allusion to Ezek 2:9–10, where the scroll is filled with writing on both sides. LXX Ezek 2:10 has the phrase και ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα ἦν τὰ ὀπισθεν και τὰ ἔμπροσθεν, ‘and in it were written things outside and inside.’ Reading (1) is the *lectio difficilior* with relatively strong attestation, and it is therefore probably the *lectio originalis*.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 322.]

“The Greek term ὀπισθόγραφος, used of a papyrus roll written on both sides (Pliny Ep. 3.5.17; Lucian Vit. auc. 9; Ulpian Digest 37.11.4), indicates the appropriateness of translating ὀπισθεν as “on the back.” This translation, however, presupposes that the βιβλίον was an opistograph rather than a doubly written document (see below). The fact that the scroll was “written both inside and on the back” would be relatively unusual, since normally a papyrus roll was used only on one side. However, this reference can be construed primarily as an allusion to the scroll in Ezek 2:9–10, which is described as having “writing on the front and on the back,” i.e., “on the obverse and on the reverse” (Hebrew כְּתוּבָה עַל פְּנֵי הָאָחֳרָי *wēhī. kētūbā pānīm wē. āhīr*, LXX και ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα ἦν τὰ ὀπισθεν και τὰ ἔμπροσθεν [B τὰ ἔμπροσθεν και τὰ ὀπίσω]), where the two Greek adverbs are in the reverse order of their counterparts in the MT, though the order of the MT is followed in MS B (Spitta, 280; Schlatter, *Apokalypse*, 61). This is an allusion to Ezek 2:9–10, although the scroll mentioned there is at first closed but then apparently unrolled before the eyes of the prophet (i.e., unrolled as is the little scroll in Rev 10:2, 8), while the scroll in Rev 5 is closed and sealed with seven seals. Taking the seer’s visionary perspective seriously means that he only sees the ὀπισθεν or back of the closed scroll, and therefore must have inferred or assumed that there was also writing on the inside, probably on the basis of his familiarity with Ezek 2:9–10. An iconographical parallel to the scroll written on the inside and on the back is found in the portrait of a man reading a scroll found on the west wall of the Dura Europas synagogue (third century A.D.), identified variously as Moses or Ezra (Kraeling, *Synagogue*, 232–35; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols* 9:113–15), who is reading a scroll (presumably the Torah) that is written on the back side, i.e., the reverse (Kraeling, *Synagogue*, 233 and plate LXXVII). Kraeling explains this as a naïve way of indicating that there was writing on the obverse. It is also possible, however, that the painter was intending to depict an *opistograph*,

of the scroll in Ezekiel 2:9-10 plays a shaping role in John’s depiction of what he saw.

Another consideration is simply the logistical angle of John seeing the βιβλίον. He was looking up at the scroll in the right hand of God sitting on His throne substantially elevated from the floor level where John was standing. What John saw was the bottom side or ‘back side’ (ὀπισθεν) of the scroll with writing which was not typical on the outside, and then assumed writing was on the inside where it would normally be found.

The above graphic gets about as close to accurately depicting this design, while the majority of graphics are entirely false largely because of placing the seven seals in a row on the outside top fold of the scroll. This clearly violates the text description of this scroll being unrolled a bit at a time until the next seal is reached and has to be broken.⁷ Thus a pause occurs in the process of unrolling the scroll when each of the seven seals is reached.



The sealing of an ancient scroll followed a pattern considerably different from modern forms. In the modern world, a pliable small amount of soft wax is applied to the surface of a document, and then impressed by an appropriate tool to make an official impression in the wax. When the wax dries it hardens and becomes more permanent.

But in the ancient world the process was different. “We do not have any examples of wax seals from antiquity.¹² Scrolls, books and letters were sealed by sealing the tie which held them together.”⁸ The seal was normally made of clay that after being stamped was dried and/or baked in order to harden it. The scroll would be tied together with a cord of some kind and through holes in the clay seal, the seal would then be attached.



This presents a challenge to the somewhat unusual folding of this scroll in Revelation at seven separate points of it being rolled up. But the procedure is relatively easy to understand with small holes being punched in the scroll at each stage of the rolling up although late rabbinic tradition, of course, insisted that only one side of a parchment Torah could be written on (Str-B, 4/1, 126, 129). On the other hand, it is also legitimate to translate ὀπισθεν as ‘on the outside’ (Louw-Nida, § 83.21), in which case the entire phrase ‘written both inside and outside’ could refer to a doubly written document in which there was a *scriptura interior*, ‘inside text,’ and *scriptura exterior*, ‘outside text’; see below.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 339.]

⁷The idea of Zahn that βιβλίον refers to a codex rather than a scroll is chronologically impossible during the first century, as well ignoring the allusion to Ezek. 2:10. .

⁸Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 7:940.

cess in order to attach the seal and to secure the scroll at each stage of the rolling up process. The Greek text for ‘breaking each seal’ is simply λῦσαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ, *to loose its seal*, in either the sense of untying the cord connected to the seal or else the cutting of the cord. This translation is more accurate than the usual rendering of λῦσαι as ‘to break’ on the assumption of it being made of wax, which was a process that didn’t develop until after the middle ages long after scrolls ceased to be used for the most part.



The legal significance of seals in the ancient world is something relatively in common with their role on official documents in the modern world. The seal (σφραγίς) functioned in the ancient world as a legal protection and guarantee in many different settings. The person sealing [σφραγίζω, ἐπι- (ἐν-) σφραγίζω] a document either himself possessed official authority or else represented some official in performing this legal action of sealing. Misuse of seals brought about heavy penalties in the ancient world.⁹ Both public and private use of seals was common in the ancient world.¹⁰ Typically, the seal reflected the power and authority of the seal owner, or his representative who had permission to use it. Most typically a signet ring or other similar marking device was basis of the making marks or stamping images in

⁹“Misuse of seals was also possible in antiquity. A statute like that of Solon in Diog. L., I, 57 was directed against this. It lays down that a ‘maker of seals’ δακτυλιογλύφος was not to retain the ‘impression’ σφραγίς of a signet-ring δακτύλιος which he had sold.²⁰ Aristoph. makes use of the theme of the fraudulent making of other people’s seals in Thes., 425.21 The seal belonged to its owner alone; no one else had the right to it. Tac. Ann., 16, 19, 3 bears witness to the practice of breaking one’s seal just before death to prevent fraudulent use.²²” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 941.]

¹⁰“In the oriental and Hell. world the seal had a public as well as a private function.³⁷ It was used in administration and government, in politics and law. All authorities had seals of office and state (δημοσία σφραγίς), esp. kings. Since it is part of the covering function of the seal to ensure secrecy,³⁸ special care was taken to secure the seal of state (ὁ ἐπιστάτης) τηρεῖ ... καὶ τὴν δημοσίαν σφραγίδα, Ps.-Aristot. *De Republica Atheniensium*, 44, 1,39 cf. also ἔχουσι τε ἐπὶ τῇ δημοσίᾳ σφραγίδι τὸν ἔσπερον ἄστρα ἐγκεχαραγμένον, Strabo, 9, 3, 1.40 The king’s seal expresses royal authorisation. He who has the king’s ring is entrusted with his power and represents him. Joseph has Pharaoh’s ring,⁴¹ and at the installation of a certain Hwy (Haia) as governor of Nubia c. 1400 B.C. the giving of the ring signifies the transfer of office.⁴² In the legal power of holding a seal there is expressed in both private and public life an element of rule; one can make decisions, one has control over things, animals and people. The holder of the seal is the holder of power and has his place in a duly constituted order. Might and right come together in the seal. This is another point of contact with the religious sphere.” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 7:942.]

the clay for use as a seal. Often drawings of a patron god would be carved into the signet ring or device. In many traditions, this seal making device took on the perception of possessing magical powers, that guaranteed the protection of the deity whose image was contained on the device.

The use of both the noun σφραγίς and the verbs σφραγίζω, ἐπι- (ἐν-) σφραγίζω for seal and sealing represent a distinctive category of meaning from the remainder of the New Testament and from the Hebrew Bible with its Hebrew and Aramaic equivalent terms from the root סָּפַר.¹¹ The idea of seal and sealing relates to the process of sealing, σφραγίζω, the scroll with seven seals σφραγίσιν ἑπτὰ, and the people sealed by or for God.¹² The official, royal background is the com-

¹¹a. The Hbr. equivalent of σφραγίς is סָּפַר, which occurs 13 times. Once סָּפַר is transl. σφραγίς, Ex. 35:22. It is hard to see why, for the meaning is bracelet as a feminine ornament along with סָּפַר ‘earrings’ and חָּסְמַי דַּאֲכָּוּלַיִם ‘rings’ or ‘signet-rings.’ The basic meaning of סָּפַר is ‘hook’ and it can be used of the pointed hook or ring put through the nose or jaw of animals or prisoners. LXX has ἄγκιστρον (‘hook’) at 4 Βασ. 19:28, φιμός (‘muzzle,’ ‘gag’) at Is. 37:29, κημός (‘muzzle’) at Ez. 19:4, 9. סָּפַר is used only at Gn. 38:25 in the sense ‘seal,’ LXX δακτύλιος. The commonest original on this is סָּפַר ‘seal,’ ‘signet-ring,’ from סָּפַר ‘to impress in a soft, plastic material,’ ‘to seal.’ But only in 10 of 44 passages is the meaning ‘signet-ring,’ and 6 of these are in Est. Worthy of note also is Da. 6:18 LXX and Θ, δακτύλιος for סָּפַר.

“b. The main equivalent of σφραγίζω and κατασφραγίζω is סָּפַר, for act., mid. and pass.; cf. the q forms in Job 14:17; Is. 8:16; Dt. 32:34; in the ni ‘were sealed’ only Est. 3:12.59 and 8:8; in the pi ‘hold sealed’ only Job 24:16; in the hi ‘to close’ Lv. 15:3 (LXX συνέστηκεν). At Da. 8:26 Θ we find σφραγίζω for סָּפַר ‘to stop up,’ ‘to hold secret,’ while Da. 9:24 Θ uses it for סָּפַר hi, properly ‘to get ready,’ ‘to finish.’”

[Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 7:943–944.]

¹²a. Sealing.

Rev. makes frequent and distinctive use of the word seal in the framework of apocalyptic images. The divine is not to “seal” the words of the prophecy, Rev. 22:10. This means that he is not to keep them secret or conceal them. σφραγίζω occurs in 20:3 in the sense of inviolable sealing as in Mt. 27:66; the angel from heaven, who binds the devil and casts him into the abyss, closes and seals the abyss for a thousand years—as the record is closed and sealed. On the other hand σφραγίζω is also used in a much weaker sense: “to close,” “to conceal,” not to reveal, 10:4. Elsewhere what is written is sealed against misuse and unauthorised knowledge (→ 941, 12 ff.), but here the combination of “seal” and “do not write” shows how much the concrete idea has faded into the background.

b. The Book with Seven Seals.

A group of “seal” references makes mention of the “sealed book,” the book with seven seals, → I, 618, 24 ff. It is a double document.⁸⁸ The seven seals remind us of Roman law with its six testes for a will along with the testator, → 941, 19 ff. The metaphor is not carried through consistently but serves as a literary device in apocalyptic presentation. The opening of the seven seals successively carries events forward, whereas all the seals must be broken

mon thread with royalty here being understood as God and Christ. Only God or Christ can seal someone or something, and only Christ can break the seal. Divine ownership and possession stand as the central theme of the seals and sealing/unsealing process.

Literary Aspects:

Clearly the literary aspects here play a pivotal role in interpreting this passage, especially the proper identification of the specific genre represented in 5:1-14.

Genre: Clearly the larger literary form here is that of apocalyptic vision as 4:1 has stated in amplifying 1:1 and 1:9-20. Understandably then the imagery and dynamics of depiction move above time and normal human experience. The visionary perspective will bounce back and forth between heaven and earth frozen in the earthly time of John as the one who experienced the

or loosened at once in the case of a deed. On the only occasion on which the compound *κατασφραγίζω* is used in the NT at 5:1 it denotes the sealing of this heavenly document. Only the Lamb has the right and power to undo this seal, 5:1, 2, 5, 9. One seal is broken after the other, 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1. Each enclosed the apocalyptic event which then took place. The idea of a document sealed with seven seals is not developed further. Legally the distinction of seals depends on those who possess them. There is no mention of this here. The number of seals is significant only because of the difference in the contents, which for its part determines the course of eschatological events.⁸⁹

c. The Sealed.

The last group of “seal” statements in Rev. refers to those who are sealed by God and for God. The second angel has “the seal of the living God,” 7:2 and 9:4. He restrains the four angels of destruction until “we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads,” 7:3. From each of the 12 tribes 12,000 are sealed, 7:4–8.⁹⁰ From the standpoint of the divine this sealing is a marking of all the members of the people, of the people in its entirety, as belonging to God, as God’s possession. Hence this seal keeps them through the terrible events of the end time. In Ez. 9:4 (→ 208, 29 ff.; 578, 16 ff.) this sign is not a fixed and special divine sign, but it becomes this in effect. Rev. 7:2 and 9:4 certainly have a specific sign in view, → 663, 26 ff. Either it is the tetragrammaton or it is X, which in the standing form or the more recumbent was like the ancient Hebrew letter *ן*.⁹¹ Membership of God’s people or fellowship is denoted by the seal of God. Those who bear it belong to God; they are His property. The ancient custom of providing something with a sign of ownership (→ 651, 9 ff.), which becomes an aspect of the *σφραγίς*, is again normative here. By specific technical development the sign became a seal and then the seal again became a sign, taking on material significance theologically, serving both as a literary image and also as a mode of speech among believers. Signs are indications and need interpretation. In the language of revelation image and reality become a distinctive unity. The reality can take shape only in the metaphor, the transferred use, the figure, the non-literal. It can be expressed only in the impression of a seal.⁹² In these basic questions the metaphorical use of the word seal in the NT is also implicated.

[Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 7:950–951.]

vision. When in the Heaven mode of the vision especially, one should be careful not to project earthly time particularly in the sense of chronological projection into the future. In John’s heaven there is no past, present, or future; only the moment of conscious being and activity. What we are privileged to ‘see’ through John’s vision are a series of actions that can move forward in sequential progression -- and sometimes with symbolic temporal markers -- or, more often, double back in repetition from a different angle of the same set of actions in previous scenes. Thus it is a fatal interpretive error to project literal earthly time into the heavenly scenes. To inject some sort of earthly calculated chronological, uniform sequence into the heaven scenes is sheer nonsense!

At the point of a smaller genre unit, Rev. 5:1-14 poses its own challenge for identifying the literary form that shaped the depiction of this heavenly scene that focuses on the Lamb of God.¹³ A variety of viewpoints have surfaced over the past several centuries of interpretive history.

Clearly 5:1-14 continues the vision narrative in 4:1-11 as signaled by the connecting links with *εἶδον* in 4:1; 5:1, 2, 6, 11. And this will continue in 6:1 and following. But the shift in focus in chapter five is to the Lamb of God. A somewhat close parallel¹⁴ to 5:1-14

¹³“The central dramatic feature of Rev 5, the primary function of this textual unit, is the introduction of the Lamb, who will break the seals of the mysterious scroll, and the cosmic sovereignty that he is revealed to possess. Anticipating the breaking of the seven seals are seven constituent dramatic features: (1) The sealed scroll is seen in the right hand of the One seated on the throne (5:1). (2) There is the proclamation of a perplexing aporia: ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals?’ (5:2). (3) There is a vain quest for someone able to open the scroll (5:3). (4) The seer weeps (5:4). (5) An elder announces that the Lion of the tribe of Judah is able to open the scroll (5:5). (6) The Lamb, suddenly seen standing between the throne and the cherubim, takes the scroll from the One seated on the throne (5:6–7). (7) The scene concludes with an elaborate liturgy of thankfulness and praise (5:8–14) as a prelude to the actual opening of the scroll, which begins in 6:1. The New Song in vv 9–10 (introduced by the aporia in v 2) is sung by the four cherubim and the twenty-four elders. The concluding ‘amen’ in v 14 is uttered by the same heavenly beings, so that vv 8, 14 serve to frame the heavenly liturgy. The doxology, in the form of an acclamation found in v 12 (Peterson, Von den Engeln, 340), is sung by a larger group of heavenly beings, for it includes countless numbers of angels. Finally, a dramatic crescendo is reached in v 13, where an acclamatory doxology is sung by beings throughout the entire cosmos.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 329.]

¹⁴“Sometime around 100 C.E. a Christian, heavily influenced by Jewish thought, especially similar to that found in the Jewish apocalypses and within some of the Dead Sea Scrolls, composed 42 odes. He may even have dedicated them to Solomon. The 11th ode was found among the Bodmer Papyri in a 3d-century Gk manuscript (no. 11). Five were translated into Coptic in the 4th century and used to illustrate the *Pistis Sophia* (Odes Sol. 1, 5, 6, 22,

surfaces in the Odes of Solomon 23:5-22.¹⁵ In the 23rd song is a celebration of the opening of a heavenly letter about the Son of Truth.¹⁶ Clear distinctions, however,

and 25). Also in the 4th century Ode 19 was quoted by Lactantius (*Div. Inst.* 4.12.3). In the 10th century a scribe copied the Odes in Syriac, but only Odes Sol. 17:7–42:20 are preserved (British Museum ms Add. 14538). In the 15th century another scribe copied them into Syriac, but again the beginning is lost (John Rylands Library Cod. Syr. 9 contains only Odes Sol. 3:1b–42:20).” [James H. Charlesworth, “Solomon, Odes Of,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 114.]

¹⁵**Ode of Solomon 23:1-22.** 1. Joy is for the holy ones. And who shall put it on but they alone? 2. Grace is for the elect ones. And who shall receive it but they who trusted in it from the beginning? 3. Love is for the elect ones. And who shall put it on but they who possessed it from the beginning? 4. Walk in the knowledge of the Lord, and you will know the grace of the Lord generously; both for His exultation and for the perfection of His knowledge. 5. And His thought was like a letter, and His will descended from on high. 6. And it was sent like an arrow which from a bow has been forcibly shot. 7. And many hands rushed to the letter, in order to catch it, then take and read it. 8. But it escaped from their fingers; and they were afraid of it and of the seal which was upon it. 9. Because they were not allowed to loosen its seal; for the power which was over the seal was greater than they. 10. But those who saw the letter went after it; that they might learn where it would land, and who should read it, and who should hear it. 11. But a wheel received it, and it came over it. 12. And a sign was with it, of the kingdom and of providence. 13. And everything which was disturbing the wheel, it mowed and cut down. 14. And it restrained a multitude of adversaries; and bridged rivers. 15. And it crossed over and uprooted many forests, and made an open way. 16. The head went down to the feet, because unto the feet ran the wheel, and whatever had come upon it. 17. The letter was one of command, and hence all regions were gathered together. 18. And there was seen at its head, the head which was revealed, even the Son of Truth from the Most High Father. 19. And He inherited and possessed everything, and then the scheming of the many ceased. 20. Then all the seducers became headstrong and fled, and the persecutors became extinct and were blotted out. 21. And the letter became a large volume, which was entirely written by the finger of God. 22. And the name of the Father was upon it; and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, to rule for ever and ever. Hallelujah.

¹⁶“One of the closer parallels to this dramatic sequence is found in a rather strange text in Odes Sol. 23:5–22. As in Rev 5:1–14, the focus of the brief drama is the revelation of the Son of Truth who vanquishes all the enemies of God. The primary dramatic features are the following: (1) The thought of the Lord is compared to a heavenly letter (the Syriac term ܡܬܘܪܬܘܘܢ occurs five times in Odes Sol. 23:5, 7, 10, 17, 21), Odes Sol. 23:5–6. (2) When the letter descended, many tried to catch it and read it, but it escaped their fingers (23:7–8a). (3) They feared the seal (Syriac ܚܬܡܐ; cf. Dan 12:4) on the letter, for it was more powerful than they (23:8b–9); i.e., they did not think they were capable of breaking it. (4) Nevertheless, those who had seen the letter pursued it (23:10). (5) However, a wheel (Syriac ܓܝܓܘܢ; cf. Hebrew אֶרְבַּן *wpn*) received the letter and overcame all opposition (23:11–16). (6) The letter (now apparently open) was one of great authority, and the head of all regions was the Son of Truth from the Most High Father, who inherited everything (23:17–19). (7) All seducers fled, and all persecutors were

are present between Ode 23 and Rev. 5.

The compositional structure of chapter five provides strong emphasis on a heavenly liturgy consisting of two praise expressions in vv. 9-10, 12, a doxology in v. 13, and the amen in v. 14. The angelic question of worthiness in v. 2 sets these up.

What type of literary form, then, are we looking at here?¹⁷ Is this a depiction of an enthronement ceremony?

obliterated (23:20). (8) The narrative concludes with these lines (23:21–22; tr. J. H. Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1973]):

21And the letter became a large volume [Syriac *pnqyt.*],
Which was entirely written by the finger of God.
22And the name of the Father was upon it;
And of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
To rule for ever and ever.
Hallelujah.

“In Rev 5:1–14 and Odes Sol. 23:5–22, the elements in each short drama are remarkably similar, and the symbolism is also close. Nevertheless, there can be no direct connection between the two texts because of the unique features that each exhibits. In Odes Sol. 23:11–16, it is apparent that the ‘wheel’ is connected with Merkavah (‘chariot’) mysticism based on Ezek 1. This feature ties the two texts even closer together, since the ‘wheel’ in Ezek 1 (which is essentially a throne vision) is closely connected to the four cherubim, and the four cherubim are also prominent in the throne vision of Rev 4–5 (Charlesworth, *Odes*, 95–96 n. 8). A comparison of similar dramatic features found in both Rev 5:1–14 and Odes Sol. 23:5–22 yields this result: A heavenly document that is sealed cannot be opened by anyone. Only one had the power to take the document and reveal its significance. In both scenarios, the sovereignty of a major heavenly figure is revealed, the Lamb in Rev 5:1–14 and the Son of Truth in Odes Sol. 23:5–22. While the conquest of the enemies of God is narrated in Odes Sol. 23:13–15, 19–20, that feature is not found in Rev 5 but is narrated later in Rev 6:1–8:1.

“There are also some differences that must be noticed: (1) In Revelation the drama takes place within the heavenly throne room, while in Odes of Solomon the drama is set on the earth. (2) In Revelation the Lamb is the only one able to open the sealed scroll, while in Odes of Solomon the Wheel plays that role, though the act of unsealing the letter is implied, even if not specifically mentioned. (3) In Odes of Solomon it appears that the letter = large volume is the Son of Truth, while in Revelation the sealed scroll represents the eschatological events determined by the sovereign will of God.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 329–330.]

¹⁷“Rev 5 is often interpreted as depicting the enthronement of the Lamb, based on the assumption that the text reflects the pattern of ancient enthronement ritual (discussed below in section A). Others have argued that Rev 5 is modeled after the tradition of a commission in the heavenly court, sometimes combining the two patterns (discussed below in section B). The view argued in this commentary (presented below in section C) is that it is more appropriate to understand Rev 5 as depicting the investiture of the Lamb based not on ancient enthronement customs and procedures but rather on the literary adaptation of Dan 7 and Ezek 1–2.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 332.]

ny in the tradition of the Israelite kings of the OT? An earlier view tended to see the scene in Revelation five along these lines and reflected the ascension of Christ to Heaven at the end of His earthly life.¹⁸ But strong

¹⁸Earlier this century, scholars influenced by the presuppositions of the history-of-religions school frequently expressed the view that the depiction of the Lamb in Rev 5 was based on ancient mythological models. A. Jeremias suggested a background in the ancient Near Eastern myth of the battle and victory of the 'year god,' perhaps in the form of the myth of Marduk who gained control of the tablets of destiny (Babylonisches, 13–14, 17–18). Gunkel saw the more general pattern of 'the enthronement of a new god,' one who could gain control of both heaven and earth through his great magical powers; the sealed scroll therefore represents a magical book (*Verständnis*, 62–63), and he was followed by Bousset, who, like Jeremias, refers to the Marduk myth ([1906] 259). Following the suggestion of Gunkel, a number of scholars have argued that Rev 5 depicts the enthronement of Christ based on the pattern of the coronation of a new ruler (Hadorn, 78; Lohmeyer, 51–52; Holtz, *Christologie*, 27–54; Sweet, 121–27; Roloff, 72–73). Lohse's views are more nuanced, for he combines two views, regarding vv 1–5 as a commission scene in the heavenly court, while considering vv 6–14 to be an enthronement scene (44). There are a number of other scholars, however, who argue against this view (van Unnik, "Worthy," 445–61; Müller, 151–52). Lohmeyer, who thought that Rev 5 reflected parallels to the enthronement of Horus, based his view that Rev 5 reflected an enthronement scene on two lines of argument, neither of which really proves the point: (1) He called attention to Rev 3:21, where the exalted Christ says that he sat down on his Father's throne after he had conquered, linking the notion of conquest with the *sessio ad dextram dei*, and combined it with Rev 7:17, which speaks ambiguously of the Lamb ἀνά μέσον τοῦ θρόνου, 'in the midst of the throne,' to claim that enthronement occurs in Rev 5. (2) He cites a number of texts that depict the enthronement of a ruler, since he is convinced that Rev 5:1–14 'recalls in the most vivid way the enthronement of a new ruler' (51).

"T. Holtz begins by referring to an ancient Egyptian three-stage enthronement ritual, which he claims forms the basic structure for Rev 5 (*Christologie*, 28). The source Holtz cites for this enthronement ritual pattern is Joachim Jeremias (Jeremias-Strobel, *Briefe*, 28–29), who was himself primarily interested in applying the pattern to 1 Tim 3:16, though he also thought that it was evident in Phil 2:9–11; Matt 28:18–20; Rev 5:5–14; Heb 1:5–14. Holtz (following Jeremias) connects each of the three stages of the Egyptian enthronement ritual with a sequence of passages in Rev 5: (1) Erhöhung, "Elevation": the new king receives divine status through a solemn symbolic action (not actually shown, but described in the speech of the elder in v 5, who declares that the Lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered and can open the seals; here 'conquer' = 'elevation'); (2) Präsentation, 'Presentation': the now deified king is presented to the assembly of gods (in v 6 John sees the slaughtered Lamb standing in the midst of the throne and the four cherubim and the elders); (3) Inthronisation, 'Enthronement': royal power and authority are then transferred to the new king (i.e., the transfer of power is symbolized when the Lamb takes the book from the hand of God in the presence of the heavenly assembly in v 7).

"Roloff agrees that there is a three-stage enthronement ritual of oriental kings reflected in Rev 5 (though he does not reveal the sources on which he is dependent), but he revises the categories in a surprisingly arbitrary way (by reversing the second and third

stages and redefining them), apparently so that the three stages will more closely 'fit' the events narrated in Rev 5 (72): (1) Erhöhung, 'Exaltation': the description of the event of exaltation in the speech of the elder (v 5); (2) Herrschaftsübertragung, 'Conferment of Ruling Power': in the taking of the scroll (vv 6–7); and (3) Präsentation des Herrschers, 'Presentation of the Ruler': in the homage paid to the Lamb by the inhabitants of the heavenly world (vv 8–14).

"This proposal, in the varying forms in which it is presented by Jeremias, Holtz, and Roloff, is extremely vulnerable to criticism on a number of fronts. First, both Jeremias and Holtz claim that this three-stage pattern is found in other early Christian texts that reflect the enthronement of Christ (Matt 28:18–20; Phil 2:9–11; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:5–14). This is neither helpful nor convincing, however, for there are major differences between these hymnic texts (particularly Phil 2:5–11; 1 Tim 3:16) and Rev 5:1–14, and scholars who have analyzed these hymns have apparently not found the Exaltation-Presentation-Enthronement schema particularly useful or enlightening (see J. T. Sanders, *Hymns*, 94–95). Jeremias attributed the basic three-part scheme to E. Norden (apparently referring to *Die Geburt des Kindes* [Leipzig; Berlin: Teubner, 1924] 116–28). Norden, however, was primarily interested in applying the scheme to *Vergil Eclogues* 4, though he did mention 1 Tim 3:16 in passing (a reference that apparently caught the eye of Jeremias). Norden himself (*Geburt*, 119) derived the scheme from A. Moret, *Du Caractère religieux de la royauté Pharaonique* (Paris, 1902) 75–113. However, Moret's account of Egyptian enthronement ritual is itself a synthesis of a variety of sources (temple reliefs of the New Kingdom, Pyramid Texts, and the Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus; on the latter see Frankfort, *Kingship*, 123–39), since no connected account of Egyptian coronation ritual has survived, but only partial and fragmentary accounts distributed over many centuries (Bonnet, *RÄRG*, 396; Fairman, "Kingship Rituals," 78). While tomb reliefs depict various select moments in coronation ceremonies (Bonnet, *RÄRG*, 397, 398, 399), the order of these events also remains a matter of speculation. Bonnet suggested his own synthetic list of five separate elements in Egyptian coronations but did not claim that they occurred in chronological order: (1) Erwählung, 'election,' (2) Einführung, 'inauguration,' (3) Krönung, 'coronation,' (4) Herrschaftsantritt or Thronbesteigung, 'assumption of rule' or 'ascent to the throne,' (5) Festzügen, 'processions' (*RÄRG*, 396–98). More recent discussions of enthronement ritual in ancient Egypt focus on two temporally and ideologically distinct enthronement rituals, coronation and enthronement (see "Königskrönung," *LexÄgypt* 3:531–33, and "Thronbesteigung," *LexÄgypt* 6:529–32), though these were probably focal moments in a much more complex series of actions (Frankfort, *Kingship*, 105–9; Fairman, "Kingship," 78–81). It is important to realize, however, that both the three-stage ritual proposed by Moret and adopted by Norden and the five-element ritual suggested by Bonnet are modern reconstructions that would not and could not have been known in the first century A.D.. The idea that the author of Rev 5 had access to this reconstruction, then, is simply impossible.

"Why would the author of Revelation have relied on an ancient Egyptian enthronement pattern (even if it were known in Ptolemaic-Roman times, as Norden erroneously claimed), particularly when there was an Israelite coronation ritual closer at hand? As we have concluded above, it is apparent that such a three-part Egyptian enthronement pattern did not exist in the first century A.D. in the form synthesized by Moret, summarized by Norden, and then simplified by Jeremias and Holtz and arbitrarily revised

by Roloff. A further complication lies in the fact that, in the tradition of Israelite enthronement ritual, the central act was the unction of the new king, representing his election by Yahweh (Halpern, *Monarchy*, 13–19). That the term ‘Messiah,’ ‘anointed one,’ was used in some phases of late second temple Judaism to refer to the coming eschatological ruler indicates the central function of unction in Israelite kingship ideology. The term *Christos*, ‘anointed one,’ is, of course, used several times in Revelation as a messianic designation (11:15; 12:10; 20:4, 6). The ritual of anointing or unction, however, is not found in Rev 5, though unction could occur earlier than the coronation ceremony itself (as, for example, in David’s anointing by Samuel in 1 Sam 16:1–13). The evidence is such that the reconstruction of a diachronic treatment of Israelite enthronement ritual is virtually impossible, since very little is known about it (see Brettler, *King*, 125–39). A completely different three-part ritual has been proposed by H.-J. Kraus, depending primarily on Ps 110 and Ps 2:7 (a precarious method; cf. Brettler, *King*, 139–41), who suggests that the Israelite coronation ritual consisted of three distinct phases, only one phase of which is also found in the Moret-Norden-Jeremias-Holtz pattern, the enthronement stage (Psalms, 111–19): (1) a prophetic speaker declared that the king was the ‘son of God’ (Pss 2:7; 110:3); (2) the king was then told to ascend the throne and sit at the right hand of God (Ps 110:1); (3) after ascending the throne the king was declared the legitimate heir (Ps 110:4). R. de Vaux, focusing on Israelite enthronement ritual (note that 1 Kgs 1:32–48 and 2 Kgs 11:12–20 are the only coronation accounts in the OT), suggests a five-part structure based on a synthesis of these two narratives (Ancient Israel, 102–7): (1) investiture with royal insignia, (2) the anointing, (3) the acclamation (e.g., ‘long live the king!’), (4) the enthronement, and (5) the homage. Of course, the more detailed the ritual pattern, the more obvious it becomes that Rev 5 does not conform to such constructs.

“Van Unnik has proposed the following arguments against the view that Rev 5 depicts an enthronement or coronation ritual (“Worthy,” 447–48): (1) The scroll or book that is taken by the Lamb from the hand of God is understood not as a royal insignia or symbol but simply as a book that can be unrolled and read. (2) Nothing is said in Rev 5 about the elevation of the Lamb; he does not receive a new status but already possesses status. (3) Nothing is said about the accession of the Lamb to the throne, though such an accession is clear in other enthronement texts such as 1 Enoch 69:26–29 and Phil 2:5–11. (4) The Lamb does not change status, but the sealed scroll does change status in that it can now be opened. Some further arguments can be added to those of van Unnik: (5) The ‘elevation’ stage, said to be reflected in v 5, does not mention the reception of divine status or the reception of insignia symbolizing divine status by the Lamb. The seer is simply told that the Lamb has conquered and can open the seals. This ‘conquest’ clearly refers to the death of Christ, as v 9 makes clear, but there is no link between this conquest by death and the acquisition of divine status, unless Rev 5 is supplemented by Rev 3:21 (the only place in Revelation where conquest and enthronement are linked). (6) The ‘presentation’ of the Lamb in Rev 5:6 is not a ritual introduction to the heavenly assembly (analogous to the *Vorstellungstage* described by Norden, *Geburt*, 121–22), but simply the statement that the seer saw the Lamb in the heavenly court for the first time. (7) The sealed scroll that the Lamb takes from the hand of God might be construed as a symbol of power and authority, but it should then be understood to indicate the ‘elevation’ stage.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 332–335.]

arguments raise questions about the accuracy of this, mostly with the various attempts to link it to different ‘enthronement’ rituals in the ancient Near Eastern world. If we knew more of the details about such rituals beginning with Saul as king of Israel, a clear linkage to the Israelite tradition, as it developed especially with David and Solomon, would be easier.

If not an enthronement ritual, then is Revelation five a Heavenly commissioning ceremony of the Lamb?¹⁹ Although appealing, again the commissioning texts in the Bible do not easily fit the paradigm set forth here.

Aune opts for a third alternative genre for Revelation five, that of an investiture of the Lamb ceremony.²⁰

¹⁹“The two focal aspects of the narrative in Rev 5 are the search for someone worthy to open the mysterious sealed scroll (v 2) and the identification of the Messiah as the only one worthy to take the scroll and open its seals (v 5). While much of Rev 5 must be attributed to the creativity of the author, there are certain basic traditional elements that he derived from OT and early Jewish heavenly court scenes. Müller (ZNW 54 [1963] 254–67) has shown that there is a lengthy tradition of heavenly court scenes, preserved in both the OT and ancient Near Eastern texts, in which the focus is on a commission given to someone in response to a question such as that in Rev 5:2, where the angelic herald asks, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?’ In the two heavenly court scenes in 1 Kgs 22:1–38 and Isa 6:1–13, the interrogative pronoun ‘who’ is used to introduce a question that is directed toward identifying someone who might serve as a messenger or agent of God (Lohse, 42; Müller, ZNW 54 [1963] 257–60; Giesen, 57). In 1 Kgs 22:20 the Lord asks the members of the heavenly court ‘Who will entice Ahab, so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?’ In Isa 6:8 it is again the Lord who says ‘Whom shall I send and who will go for us?’ In both scenes it is the enthroned Lord who frames the question, while in Rev 5:2 the question is put by a mighty angel serving as a court herald. It is probably John himself who has decided to attribute the question to an angel rather than to God himself (God speaks in Revelation only in 1:8; 21:5–8). An analogous scene occurs in the Ugaritic Keret myth, where the god Latipan or El (the text is fragmentary), speaking in the assembly of the gods, repeatedly asks ‘Who among the gods will banish his [i.e., ‘Keret’s’] illness and drive out the plague? None among the gods did answer him.’ After repeating the question seven times, Latipan himself initiates magical procedures to heal Keret (KRT C v.8–29; Pritchard, ANET, 148; Gibson, *Canaanite Myths*, 99–100: this and the following texts were collected by Müller, ZNW 54 [1963] 260–67). In the Akkadian Myth of Zu, which deals with the theft of the Tablet of Destinies by Zu, Anu the god speaks in the assembly of the gods, ‘Which of the gods shall slay Zu?’ and the assembly chooses the Irrigator (an epithet of Adad) the son of Anu to perform the deed (Pritchard, ANET, 111). In the Sumerian poem ‘Gilgamesh and Agga,’ in the context of a political assembly, Gilgamesh frames the question ‘Who has heart, let him stand up, to Agga I would have him go,’ and Bihurturri, one of those present, volunteers to go (Pritchard, ANET, 46).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 335–336.]

²⁰“The arguments against reading Rev 5 as the enthronement of the Lamb center on two central issues: (1) there is no reference in Rev 5 to the act of enthronement (or to the insignia typical of enthronement scenes), and (2) the utilization of an artificially con-

structed coronation ritual to make sense of the structure of Rev 5 is a useless exercise. On the other hand, the text of Rev 5 reflects features of commission scenes with many parallels in earlier biblical and extrabiblical literature. The argument that Rev 5 should be construed as the investiture of the Lamb is based on an analysis of the text of Rev 5 as an adaptation of Dan 7 and Ezek 1–2, and by analogy with the investiture features of other visions of the heavenly court, particularly 1 Kgs 22 and Isa 6. The term ‘investiture’ is a more appropriate designation for the narrative in Rev 5 than ‘enthronement,’ since ‘investiture’ refers to the act of establishing someone in office or the ratification of the office that someone already holds informally.

“The narrative in Rev 5 centers on the recognition of the Lamb as the only one worthy to open the scroll sealed with seven seals. The focus of the action is the taking or reception of the scroll from the right hand of God by the Lamb, for it is this act that is immediately celebrated by the two narrative hymns in 5:9–10; 5:11–12, followed by the doxology sung by all the living beings of the cosmos in 5:13–14. It is clear that the act of ‘taking’ or ‘reception’ (ἐλήφεν) of the scroll from the right hand of God (v 7) signifies the ‘reception’ (λαβεῖν) of the honors mentioned in v 12: power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and praise. Some of these qualities are ascribed elsewhere in Revelation either to God alone (power, 4:11; 7:12; 11:17; 19:1; wisdom, 7:12; might, 7:12; honor, 4:11; 7:12; glory, 4:11; 7:12; 19:1; blessing, 4:11; 7:12) or to God and the Lamb jointly (honor, 5:13; glory, 5:13). It is precisely the Lamb’s reception of this scroll that symbolizes his investiture.

“The investiture scene in Rev 5 appears to have been adapted from Dan 7:9–14 (Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 214–15; Beale, *Daniel*, 200–228; Krodell, 160), which centers on the investiture of ‘one like a son of man,’ not his enthronement. Even though enthronement is not mentioned in Dan 7, however, scholars frequently assume that it is suggested or implied (Collins, *Comm. Daniel*, 301). The author does make use of Dan 7 in Rev 5, even though there are just two clear allusions. In Rev 5:11 there is an allusion to Dan 7:10 in the phrase μυριάδες μυριάδων καὶ χιλιάδες χιλιάδων ‘myriads and myriads and thousands of thousands’ (LXX Dan 7:10, χιλιαὶ χιλιάδες *ἐθεράπευον αὐτὸν* καὶ μύρια μυριάδες παρειστήκεισαν αὐτῷ [Theod: *ἐλειτούργουν αὐτῷ*], ‘a thousand thousands served him and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him’), found in Rev 5:11 (also alluded to in 1 Enoch 14:22; 40:1; 1 Clem. 34:6, Apoc. Zeph. 4:1; 8:1). In Rev 5:9b–10 there is an allusion to Dan 7:14, 18 (where the author interprets the ‘one like a son of man’ figure in 7:13 collectively as in Dan 7:18, 27). Here is a synoptic comparison of Rev 5:9b–10 and Dan 7:14, 18:

<i>Rev 5:9b–10</i>	<i>Dan 7:14</i>	<i>Dan 7:18</i>
every tribe, tongue, people, and nation	[14b] all peoples, nations, languages	
and made them a	[14a] To him was given	The holy ones of the Most High shall receive the
kingdom and priests and they will reign on the earth	dominion and glory and kingship	kingdom
	his dominion is an everlasting	and possess the kingdom

Although at first glance this may seem like quibbling over precise meanings of the terms ‘enthronement,’ ‘commissioning,’ and ‘investiture,’ the nuances of each of these terms in ancient texts signals different ideas that are important to distinguish. The arguments for the latter label of ‘investiture’ especially in light of the dependence of John on Dan. 7:9-18²¹ are quite persua-

dominion that shall not forever pass away

and his kingship shall never be destroyed

“The author has applied the language of Dan 7:14, 18 to the redemptive death of Christ, which has ‘enthroned’ Christians as kings and priests. The author has overlaid the existing kingship language in Dan 7:14, 18 with the ‘kingdom and priests’ language from Exod 19:6 (which he has also used in 1:7; 20:6).

“The mysterious reference in Dan 7:9 to thrones that were set in place was apparently transformed by the author into the twenty-four thrones on which the heavenly elders sit (Rev 4:4), quite independently of the rabbinic messianic speculation about the thrones of Dan 7:9 (see Comment on Rev 3:21).

“The narrative focus in the throne theophany of Dan 7:9–14 is the enthroned Ancient of Days who judges the fourth beast and has it executed and burned with fire (v 11). In v 13, ‘one like a son of man’ comes with the clouds and ‘he was presented’ (Aramaic ܐܘܢܝܢܐ *ûqedāmôhî*; Theod προσηνέχθη) before the Ancient of Days, i.e., a royal audience (Montgomery, *Daniel*, 304). This presentation is followed by an investiture, which Montgomery describes as a ‘viceregal investiture’ (*Daniel*, 304). The character of this investiture is described in v 14, though symbols of investiture are mentioned:

To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed

“This short list of three prerogatives, two of which deal with imperial power, is greatly expanded to seven prerogatives in Rev 5:12 and four prerogatives in Rev 5:13.

“The author of Rev 4–5 has taken the basic framework of Dan 7:9–18 and freely adapted it for a new purpose. The presentation of the ‘one like a son of man’ before the enthroned Ancient of Days in Dan 7:13 results in his investiture. John has grounded that investiture on the sacrificial death of Christ, which now becomes the very basis for investiture. The motif of the sealed scroll does not occur in Dan 7 (there is only the reference to the books being opened; cf. Rev 20:12) but is imported from Ezek 2:9–10 to serve as a symbol of investiture.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 336–338.]

²¹**Dan. 7:9-18.** 9 ἐθεώρουν ἕως ὅτε θρόνοι ἐτέθησαν, καὶ παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν ἐκάθητο ἔχων περιβολὴν ὡσεὶ χιόνα, καὶ τὸ τρίχωμα τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ ἔριον λευκὸν καθαρὸν, ὁ θρόνος ὡσεὶ φλόξ πυρός, † 10 καὶ ἐξεπορεύετο κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ποταμὸς πυρός, χιλιαὶ χιλιάδες ἐθεράπευον αὐτὸν καὶ μύρια μυριάδες παρειστήκεισαν αὐτῷ· καὶ κριτήριον ἐκάθισε καὶ βίβλοι ἠνεώχθησαν. † 11 ἐθεώρουν τότε τὴν φωνὴν τῶν λόγων τῶν μεγάλων, ὧν τὸ κέρας ἐλάλει, καὶ ἀπετυμπανίσθη τὸ θηρίον.

sive.

Daniel's υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου, *Son of man*, (7:13) receives from the παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν, *Ancient of Days*, an everlasting kingdom in which the ἅγιοι ὑψίστου, *the holy ones of the Most High*, will participate (7:18). For John, this υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου is none other than the ἀρνίον, *Lamb*, who is ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα, ἡ ρίζα Δαυὶδ, *the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David*. Through having been slaughtered, He is worthy to open the scroll containing the eternal Will of God. A ritual of investiture with Heavenly authority and power, as the subsequent praises affirm in vv. 9-14. The participation of the ἅγιοι ὑψίστου in Daniel 7 are those who have been redeemed by the sacrificial blood of the Lamb (Rev. 5:9-10). Thus Daniel seven provides a foundation, as well as elements from Isaiah six and Ezekiel two, for a beautiful affirmation of the heavenly authority of Christ as the Lamb of God. To John's read-

καὶ ἀπώλετο τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐδόθη εἰς καῦσιν πυρός.† 12 καὶ τοὺς κύκλῳ αὐτοῦ ἀπέστησε τῆς ἐξουσίας αὐτῶν, καὶ χρόνος ζωῆς ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἕως χρόνου καὶ καιροῦ.† 13 ἑθεώρουν ἐν ὄραματι τῆς νυκτὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἦρχετο, καὶ ὡς παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν παρῆν, καὶ οἱ παρεστηκότες παρῆσαν αὐτῷ.† 14 καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐξουσία, καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς κατὰ γένη καὶ πᾶσα δόξα αὐτῷ λατρεύουσα· καὶ ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτοῦ ἐξουσία αἰώνιος, ἣτις οὐ μὴ ἀρῆθῆ, καὶ ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ, ἣτις οὐ μὴ φθαρῆ.† — 15 καὶ ἀκηδιάσας ἐγὼ Δανιηλ ἐν τούτοις ἐν τῷ ὄραματι τῆς νυκτὸς† 16 προσῆλθον πρὸς ἓνα τῶν ἐστῶτων καὶ τὴν ἀκριβείαν ἐζήτησαν παρ' αὐτοῦ ὑπὲρ πάντων τούτων. ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ λέγει μοι καὶ τὴν κρίσιν τῶν λόγων ἐδήλωσέ μοι† 17 Ταῦτα τὰ θηρία τὰ μεγάλα εἰσὶ τέσσαρες βασιλείαι, αἱ ἀπολοῦνται ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς·† 18 καὶ παραλήγονται τὴν βασιλείαν ἅγιοι ὑψίστου καὶ καθέξουσι τὴν βασιλείαν ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων.†

9 As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire.10 A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

11 I watched then because of the noise of the arrogant words that the horn was speaking. And as I watched, the beast was put to death, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. 12 As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. 13 As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. 14 To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

15 As for me, Daniel, my spirit was troubled within me, and the visions of my head terrified me. 16 I approached one of the attendants to ask him the truth concerning all this. So he said that he would disclose to me the interpretation of the matter: 17 "As for these four great beasts, four kings shall arise out of the earth. 18 But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever — forever and ever."

ership in Asia who faced constant criticisms from pagan and Jewish neighbors denying legitimacy to Christ and to their commitment to Him John proclaims loud and clear that God's ultimate blessing has been conveyed on Christ. This Christ has pulled back the curtains of Heaven to give him a dramatic picture of the divine investiture of this authority. The very Jewish tones of this depiction take the assertion straight to their Jewish critics who were in the synagogue of Satan (cf. 2:9, 3:9).

Literary Setting: The literary context of 5:1-7 is relatively easy to determine. First, it stands as a part of the larger unit of 5:1-14 that centers on Christ as the Lamb of God who is worshiped by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. Additionally, an uncountable number of angels in Heaven also worship Him. Internally, the larger text appears to be divided into three subunits: vv. 1-5, 6-10, 11-14, as signaled by repetition of εἶδον, *I saw*, at the beginning of each segment. From a rhetorical narrative stand point, the thought flow revolves around finding someone worthy to open the Heavenly scroll, vv. 1-7, and then praise of Christ as the Lamb who is worthy, vv. 8-14.

The larger context is chapters four and five, where the continuation of the vision of Heaven introduced in 4:1-2a continues to be disclosed. First, it centers on the majesty of God seated on the throne of the universe (4:1-11) and then on Christ as the sacrificial Lamb (5:1-14). Additionally, chapter five functions to set up the series of texts depicting the unfolding of this heavenly scroll in 6:1-8:1.

Thus with each successive scene we are permitted another glimpse into the forbidden world of Heaven in order to understand just who our God is and how He works not only in Heaven but also in His creation in order to carry out His eternal intentions that have been in place long before the world was created. This is far richer, than the sometimes interpretive limitation of this text as an almost magical prediction of some far away future moment in time. John's first readers in the Roman province of Asia (cf. 1:4) needed this profound affirmation of the awesomeness of Almighty God and how He works now according to His eternal plan, as well as how He has worked and how He will work. Clearly John speaks to their needs in ways that are absolutely marvelous and rich with deep spiritual insights.

Since the end of the first Christian century believers of every generation share the same spiritual needs as those first readers in Asia. Who is the God of Christians? How does He function in human history across its entire spectrum? Is Christ legitimately the divine Son of God with status in Heaven? Many down through the centuries have condemned Christians as worshiping just a human being making false claims of divinity. Many have ridiculed the idea of an all powerful God sit-

ting in control over this world filled with powerful human rulers. But John's dramatic glimpse into the mysterious realm of Heaven opens up to believers a dramatic picture of the awesomeness of both God and Christ along with their eternal intentions for the created world. These are no puny deities that can be carved out of stone or wood and set up in humanly constructed temples as objects of worship. No indeed! God and Christ are in the center of the universe, mysteriously hidden from the eyes of non-believers, but who control all of creation and are continuing to work out the divine will for it

put in place long before creation existed. These plans are comprehensive covering everything from eternity past to eternity future, both on the earth and in Heaven itself. John has been given the unbelievable privilege to seeing a glimpse of all this and then in making known what he saw to us who worship and serve both Christ and God.

Literary Structure: The block diagram of the Greek text in English translation below highlights the internal organization of ideas in 5:1-7 with a visual depiction of this structure.

5.1 And
159 **I saw . . . a scroll**
 in the right hand |
 of the|One sitting
 | upon the throne
 written
 | on the inside and on the back
 sealed with seven seals.

5.2 And
160 **I saw an angel**
 strong
 proclaiming
 in a loud voice:
 Who is worthy
 to open the scroll
 and
 to loose its seals?

5.3 And
161 **no one was able . . .**
 in heaven |
 neither upon the earth |
 nor under the earth |
 to open the scroll
 or
 to look in it.

5.4 And
162 **I began weeping**
 bitterly,
 because no one was found worthy
 to open the scroll
 or
 to look in it.

5.5 And
163 **one of the elders says to me:**
 stop weeping
 indeed there stands the Lion
 | from the tribe of Judah
 | the Root of David
 to open the scroll
 and
 its seven seals.

5.6 And
164 I saw
in the midst of the throne |
and |
of the four living creatures |
and |
in the midst of the elders |
a Lamb
standing
as slaughtered
having seven horns
and
seven eyes
/-----|
which are the seven spirits of God
sent out
into all the earth.

5.7 And
165 He went
and
166 He took (the scroll)
out of the right hand
of the One sitting on the throne.

Rhetorical Summary of the Text Structure

Statements 159 and 160 with εἶδον as the core verb set up the scene with John seeing both the scroll and the angel. Statements 161 and 162 pose the dilemma of finding one worthy to open the scroll. Statement 163 solves the dilemma through the words of the elder.

Statements 164 - 166 again with εἶδον in #164 depict the implementation of the solution with Christ as the Lamb being worthy to take the scroll from God to open it and look in it to read its contents. Statement 164 describes the worthiness of the Lamb, while #s 165 and 166 describe action taken based on this worthiness.

Exegesis of the Text:

In light of the above structural analysis, the exegesis of the text will be divided into two sections based on a question / answer structure. The subunits in vv. 1-5 (#s 159-160; 161-162; and 163) will form further division of the text for exegetical purposes. Likewise the two subunits in vv. 6-7 (#164 and 165-166) will provide further subdivisions of the text.

A. Who is worthy? vv. 1-5

5.1 Καὶ εἶδον ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιὰν τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου βιβλίον γεγραμμένον ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν κατεσφραγισμένον σφραγῖσιν ἑπτὰ. 2 καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον ἰσχυρὸν κηρύσσοντα ἐν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· τίς ἅγιος ἀνοίξει τὸ βιβλίον καὶ λύσει τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ; 3 καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ οὐδὲ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐδὲ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς ἀνοίξει τὸ βιβλίον οὔτε βλέπειν αὐτό. 4 καὶ ἔκλαιον πολὺ, ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἅγιος εὗρέθη ἀνοίξει τὸ βιβλίον



οὔτε βλέπειν αὐτό. 5 καὶ εἶς ἐκ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων λέγει μοι· μὴ κλαῖε, ἰδοὺ ἐνίκησεν ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα, ἡ ρίζα Δαυὶδ, ἀνοίξει τὸ βιβλίον καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ.

5.1 Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside 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 bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 5 Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

Central to understanding the idea structure is the

repetition of εἶδον in vv. 1-2, and 6. In the first two verses it serves to introduce the visionary scene of vv. 1-14, while in v. 6 the next unit of ideas are introduced as part two of this text. The response of the heavenly individuals -- living creatures, elders, and angels -- comprise the second half of this chapter in vv. 8-14, with εἶδον coming again in verse 11 to draw attention to the angels as the newly introduced third group of heavenly individuals praising the Lamb.²²

What John saw: vv. 1-2. 5.1 Καὶ εἶδον ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου βιβλίον γεγραμμένον ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν κατεσφραγισμένον σφραγῖσιν ἑπτὰ. 2 καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον ἰσχυρὸν κηρύσσοντα ἐν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· τίς ἄξιός ἀνοίξει τὸ βιβλίον καὶ λῦσαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ; 5.1 Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside 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?” The depiction of God thus far in John’s vision has been indirect and without any attempt to describe a person with shape or form. Thus far what we have seen of God is

- 1.1. ἦν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεός, which God gave to Him [Jesus Christ].
- 1.2. τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, the Word of God.
- 1.4. ἀπὸ ὃ ὦν καὶ ὃ ἦν καὶ ὃ ἐρχόμενος, from Him who is and who was and who is to come.
- 1.6. ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, priests to God even His Father.
- 1.8. Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός, ὃ ὦν καὶ ὃ ἦν καὶ ὃ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ. “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.
- 2.7. ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ. in the paradise of God.
- 2.18. ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ. the Son of God.
- 3.2. ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. before My God.
- 3.5. ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρός μου. before My Father.
- 3.12. ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου. in the temple of My God.
- 3.12. τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου. the name of My God.

²²“Most have rightly regarded v 1b as evoking the image in Ezek. 2:9b–10. The βιβλίον (“book”) is further described with the phrase κατεσφραγισμένον σφραγῖσιν ἑπτὰ (“sealed with seven seals”), which appears to be a merging of Daniel 12 and Isa. 29:11 (see textual comparisons and discussion below).

“It should be recalled that 4:1–5:1 follows a structural outline that is identical to that of Dan. 7:9ff. and Ezekiel 1–2 (see pp. 314–16 above). The following analysis of Rev. 5:2–14 will show that the outline of Daniel 7 continues to be followed, not that of Ezekiel 1–2. Further, while allusions to Ezekiel 1–2 do not disappear in 5:2–14, there are more numerous allusions to Daniel 7. The presence of all these OT backgrounds enhances further the notion of judgment with which this vision is saturated.”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 337.]

- 3.12. τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου. of the city of My God.
- 3.12. ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, that comes down out of heaven from My God.
- 3.14. τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ, of the creation of God.
- 3.21. ὡς κἀγὼ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρός μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ. just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

4.2. ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθημένος, upon the throne One sitting

4.3. καὶ ὁ καθημένος ὅμοιος ὀράσει λίθῳ ἰάσπιδι καὶ σαρδίῳ, καὶ ἴρις κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου ὅμοιος ὀράσει σμαραγδίνῳ. And the One seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald.

3.5. Καὶ ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου ἐκπορεύονται ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταί, καὶ ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρὸς καιόμεναι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, ἃ εἰσὶν τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ. Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God;

3.8. ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος ὁ θεός ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος. Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come

3.11. ἄξιός εἶ, ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεός ἡμῶν, λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν, ὅτι σὺ ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ τὸ θέλημά σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν. You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

As becomes obvious from these references John has no interest in describing the “physical” appearance of God. What matters is both the character and the actions of God. His outward appearance is of little importance, especially from the spiritual perspective of His relationship to His people. Who God is in His character and how He treats His people are the only important aspects.

Thus when John sees the scroll ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου, in the right hand of the One sitting upon the throne, the size and shape of God’s hand is unimportant. Here the point is that the scroll in God’s τὴν δεξιάν, right hand. No mention is given here or previously as to when God picked up the scroll with His right hand. Very likely the background image a deity sitting with a cylinder scroll laying in his lap and held by the right hand lies behind this depiction.²³ The unusual use of ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν reflects most likely the scroll resting in the palm of the right hand. ²⁴The symbolism

²³“The sealed scroll would look like a cylinder held in the right hand of God who is seated on the throne, perhaps with the scroll resting on his lap, an image with many parallels in Greco-Roman art (Birt, Buchrolle, 85–91, esp. plates 46–48).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 338.]

²⁴“The phrase ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν is problematic primarily because of the preposition ἐπί (the use of ἐπί in Revelation in general is problematic; see Schmid, Studien 2:209–13). ἐπί + genitive, ἐπί + dative, and ἐπί + accusative can all be used, apparently inter-

of the right hand as expressing power and authority is clearly present here.²⁵ This book²⁶ rests in God's full

changeably, to mean 'on, upon,' as 14:9 indicates: ἐπὶ τοῦ μετώπου αὐτοῦ ἢ ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ, 'on his forehead or on his hand.' ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν could mean (1) 'in the right hand,' i.e., held in the hand (an unusual meaning, but the unanimous choice of the major English versions: AV, RSV, NRSV, NEB, REB, NIV), (2) 'upon the right hand,' i.e., lying on the open palm of the right hand (some Latin translations of ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν, such as Tyconius² and Beatus, have supra dexteram, 'on the right hand'; Bousset [1906] 254; Charles, 1:136; 2:399), or (3) 'at the right side' (cf. LXX Ps 120:5, ἐπὶ χεῖρα δεξιάν, 'at your right hand'; BAGD, 288; Bauer-Aland, 584, auf der rechten Hand). Evidence for these possibilities is surveyed in Stefanovič, ("Background," 145–57), who almost alone favors the third view. In the phrase ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν (found only here in Revelation as a lectio originalis), ἐπὶ probably means 'in,' just as the phrase ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ in 20:1 means 'in his hand' (clarified by scribal alteration to read ἐν τῇ χειρὶ; see Notes on 20:1) and is analogous with ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου, 'in my fight hand,' in 1:20 (as the parallel ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ, 'in his fight hand,' in 1:16 indicates). The phrase κρότησον ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα σου, 'grasp in your hand' (LXX Ezek 21:17), is a close parallel to this use of ἐπί + accusative, since the author is probably dependent for his image of a scroll written on both sides on Ezek 2:9–10, where the phrase ἐν αὐτῇ, 'in it [i.e., 'the hand']' is used for the location of the unrolled scroll handed to the prophet. While the scroll here is described as in the 'right hand' of the one sitting on the throne, in Ezek 2:9 it simply says that 'a hand' (the owner is not identified) was extended to Ezekiel holding a scroll. In addition, the phrase ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν is a variant for ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς in Rev 1:20 attested by Oecumenius²⁰⁵³ 2062 Andr h2302, where it must mean 'in the right hand.' The less ambiguous phrase ἐν τῇ χειρὶ, 'in the right hand,' is used to describe the location of the little scroll held by the angel in Rev 10:2, 8. That the Lamb takes the scroll ἐκ τῆς δεξιᾶς τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου, 'from the fight hand of the one seated on the throne' (5:7), further suggests that the roll is depicted 'in' the hand of God in 5:1, though ἐκ τῆς δεξιᾶς can also mean 'from the fight side.' [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 339–340.]

²⁵Rather interesting is the difference in contents between what God held in His right hand (cf. 5:1, 7): βιβλίον, *a scroll*; and what Christ held (cf. 1:16, 20; 2:1): ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ, *the seven stars*. John must have felt the weight of that large right hand of Christ when it was placed on his shoulder to wake him up (cf. 1:17).

²⁶"The earliest form of books was the scroll made either of papyrus or animal skins (later vellum or parchment was used). The scroll was made by joining sheets of papyrus or leather together into a continuous strip which was then rolled. The average size of the scroll was about 10-12 inches high and 20-30 feet long. Although much longer scrolls exist, they were awkward to use and individual passages were difficult to find. Scholars have suggested that some of the divisions of the Bible, such as the division of the Torah (Gen.-Deut.) into five books, were dictated by the length of scroll that could be handled easily. Beginning about the second century A.D. the bulky scrolls were replaced by the codex, composed of single or folded sheets of writing stacked and sewn together in the manner of the modern book. However, the use of handwritten scrolls in the Jewish synagogue has continued to the present." [Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 139.]

control.²⁷

The sixty-four dollar question here is the identification of the βιβλίον, the *scroll*.²⁸ From the next three chapters we learn its contents, a seven fold set of affirmations about the power and authority of God in His ability to impose judgment at any time upon His creation.

Interestingly in 10:8-11, John is told to eat this scroll in order to share its message with the people.

8 Καὶ ἡ φωνὴ ἦν ἠκουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πάλιν λαλοῦσαν μετ' ἐμοῦ καὶ λέγουσαν· ὕπαγε λάβε τὸ βιβλίον τὸ ἠνεωγμένον ἐν τῇ χειρὶ τοῦ ἀγγέλου τοῦ ἐστῶτος ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. 9 καὶ ἀπῆλθα πρὸς τὸν ἀγγελον λέγων αὐτῷ δοῦναί μοι τὸ βιβλαρίδιον. καὶ λέγει μοι· λάβε καὶ κατάφαγε αὐτό, καὶ πικρανεῖ σου τὴν κοιλίαν, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ στόματί σου ἔσται γλυκὺ ὡς μέλι.

10 Καὶ ἔλαβον τὸ βιβλαρίδιον ἐκ τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ ἀγγέλου καὶ κατέφαγον αὐτό, καὶ ἦν ἐν τῷ στόματί μου ὡς μέλι γλυκὺ καὶ ὅτε ἔφαγον αὐτό, ἐπικράνθη ἡ κοιλία μου. 11 καὶ λέγουσίν μοι· δεῖ σε πάλιν προφητεῦσαι ἐπὶ λαοῖς καὶ ἔθνεσιν καὶ γλώσσαις καὶ βασιλεῦσιν πολλοῖς.

8 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." 9 So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, "Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth." 10 So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.

11 Then they said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

This rather fascinating image of John eating a scroll, especially one as large as this one even though it is designated as τὸ βιβλαρίδιον, highlights the symbolic nature of the depiction of the scroll. Remember that John is currently in the 'apocalyptic mode' rather than a 'physical mode' of consciousness. The point made by this description is that John could not speak 'pro-

²⁷"The 'right hand' of God is of course a common metaphor frequently found in the OT and Judaism signifying his power and authority (Exod 15:6, 12; Pss 18:35; 20:6; 63:8; Isa 41:10; 48:13). The exalted Christ is depicted holding seven stars in his fight hand (Rev 1:16; 2:1), but here the 'right hand' probably symbolizes a place of refuge and protection (see Comment on 1:16)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 340.]

²⁸From usage in Revelation, two Greek words are used to refer to a scroll of some type:

1) ἡ βίβλος in 3:5 and 20:15 as ἡ βίβλος τῆς ζωῆς, the book of life

2) τὸ βιβλίον as the book of life (τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς) in 17:8; 21:7. Also as the heavenly scroll (βιβλίον) in 5:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 6:14; 10:8. Further in the plural as books (βιβλία / τοῖς βιβλίοις) of human deeds in 20:12. Additionally as a reference to the book of Revelation itself in 1:11 (βιβλίον, book); 22:7, 9, 10, 18 (τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου, of this book), 19 (τοῦ βιβλίου τῆς προφητείας ταύτης, of the book of this prophecy)

phetically', i.e., correctly deliver God's message, until he had first mastered its contents himself.

In the background of this heavenly scroll from all indication lies the prophetic tradition of a heavenly scroll in Ezekiel 2:9-10

9 και εἶδον και ἰδοῦ χειρ ἐκτεταμένη πρὸς με, και ἐν αὐτῇ κεφαλῆς βιβλίου.† 10 και ἀνείλησεν αὐτὴν ἐνώπιον ἐμοῦ, και ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα ἦν τὰ ὀπισθεν και τὰ ἔμπροσθεν, και ἐγγραπτο εἰς αὐτὴν θρῆνος και μέλος και οὐαί.†

9 I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. 10 He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe.

Clearly the idea of a heavenly scroll containing the will of Almighty God is present both in Ezekiel and then also in Revelation. Also in the background is the common contemporary images and statues of the Roman emperor seated on a throne and holding a scroll in his right hand, some of which existed in Ephesus.²⁹ These symbolized the authority and the will of the emperor.

But defining precise contents found in the scroll is very difficult since no specific detailing of the contents is given in Revelation. In the interpretative history of this passage, however, no hesitancy to define the contents is found. And thus a wide range of proposals can be found by commentators from the third century forward.³⁰ The reality of the matter is that no one knows

²⁹“There are numerous iconographical and literary parallels to the motif of a scroll held in one or both hands, though the meaning of this symbol varies (Birt, *Buchrolle*; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols* 9:146–47; vol. 11, plates 126, 138). In a detailed study of the depiction of scrolls held by people depicted in Greco-Roman art, Birt distinguishes between depictions of closedbook rolls and those of open book rolls (*Buchrolle*, 40–123, 124–96). He further divides the motif of the closed scroll into submotifs, including the closed scroll in the lefthand (*Buchrolle*, 43–80) and the closed scroll in the right hand (*Buchrolle*, 80–123). In a relief often called the ‘Apotheosis of Homer’ now in the British Museum (see Pollitt, *Art*, 15, plate 4), by the sculptor Archelaos of Priene, ca. 220–150 B.C. (Priene was located on the Maeander a few miles southeast of Ephesus), the lowest of three registers shows Homer (depicted as a Zeus-like figure) enthroned with a scepter in his left hand and a scroll in his right hand (obviously representing his famous epics). Several late Roman sarcophagi depict the deceased holding an open scroll (Koch-Sichtermann, *Sarkophage*, plates 119, 264–65). In a Greek translation of an aretology of the Egyptian god Imouthes of Ptah, a vision of the god describes him as dressed in bright linen and holding a closed scroll in his left hand (POxy 1381, lines 120–21). More directly relevant to this passage are the numerous reliefs from the period of the Roman empire that depict an emperor holding a scroll in his hand (Birt, *Buchrolle*, 68–73; *Reichelt, Buch*, 164–66). This scroll in the hands of various emperors apparently functions as a symbol of imperial power and authority.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 340–341.]

³⁰“*The Content of the Scroll*. Although there has been a great deal of speculation about the contents of the sealed scroll, the text of Rev 5:1–8:1 (the section dealing explicitly with the sealed scroll

and the breaking of its seven seals by the Lamb) contains no explicit indication of the contents of the scroll. If the scroll of Rev 5 is regarded as identical with the open scroll of Rev 10 (which is not likely), more clues to its character are found in that chapter. An important clue for the contents of the scroll is found in Ezek 2:9–10, the model for this passage, in which the contents of the scroll shown to Ezekiel are described as ‘words of mourning, lamentation, and woe,’ i.e., the message of divine judgment that the prophet will announce. This probably refers to the prophet’s proclamation of the coming judgment on Israel (Ezek 4–24) and on the nations (Ezek 25–32). The contents of the scroll of Rev 5 have been interpreted narrowly and broadly: (a) *Narrow conceptions* of the significance of the scroll maintain that the author intended his audience to understand that the contents are identical with all or part of the narration of eschatological events that follow the breaking of the first seal in Rev 6:1 (perhaps even with the entire book of Revelation itself). There is a partial parallel to the sealed scroll in 1 Enoch 93:1–15, where ‘Enoch’ is said to know the words of the tablets of heaven and prophesies by speaking ‘from the books’ (v 3). Similarly, another heavenly book is referred to in *Hermas Vis.* 1.2.2; 2.1.3–4; 2.4.2–3. (b) *Broader conceptions* of the contents of the scroll hold that it has little or nothing to do with the narrative of eschatological events in part or all of the remainder of the book. Let us consider the various options within each of these approaches.

(a) The view that there is a correlation between the content of the scroll to the eschatological events narrated in part or all of Revelation following 6:1 has been expressed in a variety of ways.

[1] At a more general level, it has been maintained that the scroll narrates the eschatological punishments inflicted on the world by the will of God (Schüssler Fiorenza, *CBQ* 30 [1968] 564), or that it is essentially identical with what John has been commissioned to write to the seven churches.

[2] If the scroll contains a narrative of eschatological events that are put in motion by the breaking of the seven seals, it has been argued that the contents of the scroll begin to be actualized with the opening of the first seal in 6:1 and extend either to 8:1 (the opening of the seventh seal) or even further into the book (Bousset [1906] 254–55; Charles, 1:135; Hadorn, 75; Lohmeyer, 53; G. Schrenk, *TDNT* 1:619; Müller, *ZNW* 54 [1963] 255).

[3] Others argue that the contents of the scroll cannot begin to be actualized until all seven seals have been broken, an event that does not occur until 8:1, so that the contents of the scroll are only revealed beginning with 8:2 (Swete, 75; Beckwith, 263–64; Bornkamm, *ZNW* 36 [1937] 132–49; Jeremias, *TDNT* 4:872 n.250; Strobel, “Apokalypse,” *TRE* 3:178–79).

[4] Views [2] and [3] have been neatly combined by Hellholm, who regards the form of the scroll as a doubly written legal document (see above), arguing that 6:1–7:17 is the *scriptura exterior* that summarizes the content of the scroll, while 8:1–22:5 is the *scriptura interior*, i.e., an account of the content of the scroll (“Genre,” 48–53). The problem with this view is that this scroll is never given to the narrator to transcribe, as most heavenly books are, and the scroll is never mentioned again after 8:1.

[5] Some scholars have gone so far as to regard Rev 6:1–22:6 as essentially a transcript of the scroll (Staritz, *ZNW* 30 [1931] 166; Holtz, *Christologie*, 35).

[6] Since the author describes his composition as a prophetic βιβλίον (1:11; 22:7, 9, 18–19), some have identified the entire work as the scroll with seven seals (even though it is explicitly stated in 22:10 that John’s prophetic book should not be sealed).

(b) There are several other ways of understanding the broader significance of the sealed scroll apart from assuming that all or part of Revelation is a transcription or enactment of the eschatological plan of God contained in the scroll.

[1] A typical broad understanding of the significance of the scroll is that it is a 'book of destiny,' consisting of God's predetermined plan for human beings and the world (variously described by Swete, 75; Caird, 72; Beasley-Murray, 120; Lohse, 41–42), or the foreordained eschatological plan of God, which cannot be known until the period of fulfillment, a biblical tradition reflected in Ezek 2:9–10; Dan 8:26; 12:9; Jub. 32:20–22; 1 Enoch 81:2–3. An example is the 'tablets of heaven' that 'Enoch' was commanded to read that contained 'all the deeds of men, and all who will be born of flesh on the earth for the generations of eternity' (1 Enoch 81:2; cf. 106:19–107:1).

[2] The scroll is the Book of Life referred to frequently in Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27), containing the names of the saints (A. Jeremias, *Babylonisches*, 17). The opening of this book would then represent the disclosure of the names of the saints. This view is problematic, since the opening of the Book of Life is first mentioned in 20:12, while the scroll with seven seals is opened in 6:1–8:1 (Staritz, *ZNW* 30 [1931] 157–58). Further, the opening of the seals in 6:1–8:1 has nothing to do with the disclosure of the identity of the saints.

[3] The scroll is a record of the sins of humankind, or *Schulderkunde*, for which the Lamb has made atonement, and the accomplishment of this atonement or redemption is symbolized by the opening of the scroll (Roller, *ZNW* 36 [1937] 98–113; Müller, *Messias*, 163–65). The chief objection to this view is that Rev 5 is not a judgment scene.

[4] The scroll is Scripture or the Old Testament (Piper, *CH* 20 [1951] 13–15) or more specifically the Torah (Mowry, *JBL* 71 [1952] 82–83; Shepherd, *Liturgy*, 88; Sweet, 123), which is a sealed book until christologically interpreted (Luke 4:21; 28:25–27; 2 Cor 3:15; Prigent, 94–95; Harrington, *Apocalypse*, 32, 116, 148). The tables of the law are described as ἐνθεν καὶ ἐνθεν ἦσαν γεγραμμένα, 'written on both sides' (Exod 32:15). The views of Piper and Mowry are based in part on the supposition that the liturgy of Rev 4–5 is a heavenly counterpart to the worship services of early Christianity. The scene in which the Lamb takes the sealed scroll from the right hand of God has suggestive parallels in rabbinic sources, where it is supposed that Moses received the Torah from the right hand of God (Deut. Rab. 11.10; Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah* 7:185), and the king of Israel may have been given a copy of the Torah (Deut 17:18–20). The view that the sealed scroll of Rev 5 is all or part of the OT is very old and is found as early as Hippolytus (Comm. in Dan. 34.3), Origen (Comm. in Joh. 5.4; Hom. in Exod. 12.4; Hom. in Ezek. 14.2; *Philocalia* 2.1; 5.5), and Victorinus (Comm. ad Apoc. 5.1). Origen understood this book to mean the whole of Scripture, and the statement that it was written in front and in back refers to the obvious and the remote (i.e., the literal and the spiritual) meanings of Scripture. Stefanović ("Background," 228–313) argues that the sealed scroll is analogous to 'the Covenant Book [i.e., the Book of Deuteronomy] in the enthronement ceremony of the OT Israelite kings' ("Background," 301). Because of the unworthiness of the Israelite kings, this book was 'sealed' but has now been given to the ideal Israelite king. He further describes the sealed scroll as "the 'book' of God's eternal covenant, the revelation of his salvific acts on behalf of man," which has been partially disclosed to John (i.e., it is in part identical with Revelation itself) but will not be finally opened until the end of

the contents of the scroll. Projections of specific contents then becomes largely useless speculation.

What the text does make clear is that the transfer of possession of the scroll from the right hand of God to Christ as the sacrificial Lamb (cf. vv. 7–8) signals the transfer of heavenly authority from God to the Lamb and this occasions worshipful praise of the Lamb as all powerful (cf. vv. 12–13 especially).³¹ Thus the carrying out of the will of God is handed over to Christ who is exclusively worthy to do so as symbolized by the breaking of each of the seven seals.

γεγραμμένον ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν
κατεσφραγισμένον σφραγίσιν ἐπτά, *written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.*³² This unusual description of where the writing on the scroll is located has occasioned considerable discussion. In essence, the two adverbs ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν are not opposites, but each point to a different location,³³ first inside and then on the back or bottom of the scroll.³⁴ The most sig-

history ("Background," 311).

[5] Interpreting the scroll of Rev 5 under the metaphor of a bill of divorce (Deut 24:1–3; Matt 19:7; Mark 10:4; m. B. Bat. 10:1–2; b. B. Bat. 160a), Ford understands the scroll to represent Christ's divorce of the unfaithful Jerusalem and marriage to the New Jerusalem (Ford, *JSJ* 2 [1971] 136–43; Ford, 92–94)."

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 343–346.]

³¹"*The Function of the Scroll*. (a) The sealed scroll clearly serves as a literary device for structuring the narrative of the six plagues that follow the opening of the first six seals, however else it may function. (b) The transfer of the sealed scroll from God to the Lamb clearly functions as a symbol of the unique role of Christ as the Lamb, the sovereignty of Christ, which he received from the Father. This is certainly the view of the author, for when the two hymnic segments of 5:9, 12 are compared, receiving the scroll in v 9 (λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον) is parallel to receiving power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and praise in v 12 (λαβεῖν τὴν δύναμιν κτλ). Irenaeus paraphrases Rev 5:3–7 and seems to interpret the taking of the sealed scroll from the hand of God as 'receiving power over all things from the same God who made all things by the Word' (Adv. Haer. 4.20.2); i.e., the βιβλίον is construed as a symbol of Christ's sovereignty (Stefanović, "Background," 9–10). [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 346.]

³²For more details on the complexity of γεγραμμένον ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν κατεσφραγισμένον σφραγίσιν ἐπτά. see the above discussion under **Internal History**.

³³True antonyms:

ἔσωθεν <=> ἔξωθεν; **inside** <=> **outside**

ἔμπροσθεν <=> ὀπισθεν; **front side** <=> **back side**

³⁴"While the phrase ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν is almost certainly the *lectio originalis*, these two adverbs are not opposites or antonyms as one might expect (Zahn, Introduction 3:405), and this has led to modifications in the MS tradition (see Note 5:1.d.). ἔσωθεν means 'within, on the inside' (Louw-Nida, § 83.16), and one of its antonyms is ἔξωθεν, 'outside,' 'on the outside,' 'outside of' (Louw-Nida, § 83.21), as in Luke 11:40. ὀπισθεν, on the other hand, means 'the back of,' '[from] behind,' or 'on the back' (Louw-Nida, § 83.41), and one of its antonyms is ἔμπροσθεν, 'in

nificant possible implication of this phraseology is that two separate texts may have been written on the roll of papyrus paper, one ἔσωθεν and the other ὀπίσθεν. But this is not likely. More probably this phraseology is picked up from the LXX depiction of the heavenly scroll in Ezek. 2:9-10 τὰ ὀπίσθεν καὶ τὰ ἔμπροσθεν, *the front side and the back side*.³⁵

Unlike many of the artistic depictions, all seven seals were not on the outside of the top layer of the

front, 'on front' (Louw-Nida, § 83.36), as in Rev 4:6. The Greek term ὀπισθόγραφος, used of a papyrus roll written on both sides (Pliny Ep. 3.5.17; Lucian Vit. auc. 9; Ulpian Digest 37.11.4), indicates the appropriateness of translating ὀπίσθεν as 'on the back.' This translation, however, presupposes that the βιβλίον was an opistograph rather than a doubly written document (see below). The fact that the scroll was 'written both inside and on the back' would be relatively unusual, since normally a papyrus roll was used only on one side. However, this reference can be construed primarily as an allusion to the scroll in Ezek 2:9-10, which is described as having 'writing on the front and on the back,' i.e., 'on the obverse and on the reverse' (Hebrew כְּתוּבָה פְּנִים וְאָחֶרֶת וְהִיא וְהִיא כְּתוּבָה פְּנִים וְאָחֶרֶת, LXX καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα ἦν τὰ ὀπίσθεν καὶ τὰ ἔμπροσθεν [B τὰ ἔμπροσθεν καὶ τὰ ὀπίσω]), where the two Greek adverbs are in the reverse order of their counterparts in the MT, though the order of the MT is followed in MS B (Spitta, 280; Schlatter, Apokalypse, 61). This is an allusion to Ezek 2:9-10, although the scroll mentioned there is at first closed but then apparently unrolled before the eyes of the prophet (i.e., unrolled as is the little scroll in Rev 10:2, 8), while the scroll in Rev 5 is closed and sealed with seven seals. Taking the seer's visionary perspective seriously means that he only sees the ὀπίσθεν or back of the closed scroll, and therefore must have inferred or assumed that there was also writing on the inside, probably on the basis of his familiarity with Ezek 2:9-10. An iconographical parallel to the scroll written on the inside and on the back is found in the portrait of a man reading a scroll found on the west wall of the Dura Europas synagogue (third century A.D.), identified variously as Moses or Ezra (Kraeling, Synagogue, 232-35; Goodenough, Jewish Symbols 9:113-15), who is reading a scroll (presumably the Torah) that is written on the back side, i.e., the reverse (Kraeling, Synagogue, 233 and plate LXXVII). Kraeling explains this as a naïve way of indicating that there was writing on the obverse. It is also possible, however, that the painter was intending to depict an opistograph, though late rabbinic tradition, of course, insisted that only one side of a parchment Torah could be written on (Str-B, 4/1, 126, 129). On the other hand, it is also legitimate to translate ὀπίσθεν as 'on the outside' (Louw-Nida, § 83.21), in which case the entire phrase 'written both inside and outside' could refer to a doubly written document in which there was a *scriptura interior*, 'inside text,' and *scriptura exterior*, 'outside text'; see below."

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 338-339.]

³⁵“on the obverse and on the reverse’ (Hebrew כְּתוּבָה פְּנִים וְאָחֶרֶת וְהִיא וְהִיא כְּתוּבָה פְּנִים וְאָחֶרֶת, LXX καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα ἦν τὰ ὀπίσθεν καὶ τὰ ἔμπροσθεν [B τὰ ἔμπροσθεν καὶ τὰ ὀπίσω]), where the two Greek adverbs are in the reverse order of their counterparts in the MT, though the order of the MT is followed in MS B (Spitta, 280; Schlatter, *Apokalypse*, 61).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 339.]

scroll. Instead, they were placed inside the long roll of papyrus material rolled up as a scroll. This way seven sections of writing could be opened separately and one-by-one.



Thus John's initial picture is one of God's divine will contained in writing on an unusually designed heavenly scroll resting in His right hand laying on His lap.

Clearly this stands as a tremendously important document of revelatory disclosure. But the scroll is rolled up and thus closed to reading. Its importance is highlighted by its being sealed, not once, but seven times.³⁶ And as the next scene stressed only one person is qualified to open the scroll.

Once John saw the scroll in God's hand, the next dilemma was finding someone to open it so it could be read. This is set up by the dramatic picture of an angel in verse two: καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον ἰσχυρὸν κηρύσσοντα ἐν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· τίς ἄξιός ἐστιν ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον καὶ λύσαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ; and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"³⁷

³⁶Some likelihood of a close connection between Revelation 5 and the Odes of Solomon 23 exists. Both documents were composed in the last decade of the first Christian century and the parallels between these two texts are rather remarkable.

Odes of Solomon 23 (about A.D. 100) confirms the notion of the book as a testament of inheritance. People are pictured who want to "take and read" a "sealed letter" (vv 7-8), which "became a large volume ... written by the finger of God" (v 21). However, "they were not allowed to loosen the seal, for the power which was over the seal was better than they" (v 9). Finally the letter's contents are made known, and its revelation concerns "the Kingdom and ... providence," "the Son of Truth," who "inherited and possessed everything" and who judged unbelievers (vv 18-20; note Odes Sol. 22:5: God "overthrew by my [Christ's] hands the dragon with seven heads"; cf. Rev. 12:3; 13:1). Subsequently, Odes Sol. 23 mentions that the Son together with the Father and the Spirit "rule forever and ever" (v 22). This is likely not a mere formal parallel to Revelation 5, and it is difficult to know whether it is dependent on Revelation 5 or the two texts are part of a larger community of ideas, though the former is probable because of the slightly earlier date of the Apocalypse.

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 341.]

³⁷The scene in vv 2-5 provides the entire section with a strong dramatic element, but that it can easily be omitted without interrupting the flow of the narrative in vv 1, 6-14 suggests that it has been inserted into an existing schema by the author (see Jörns, *Evangelium*, 44-47). The weeping of the seer, which is so central to the episode in vv 2-5, appears to belong to the past, reflecting the unfulfilled messianic expectation of the seer. That the narrative is dominated by the two imperfect verbs ἐδύνατο and ἐκλαίον (the aorist tense is the basic narrative tense) indicates that the author is

The reference to a ἄγγελον ἰσχυρόν, powerful angel, is found not just here but also in 10:1 and 18:21, but evidently in reference to three separate angels.³⁸ The adjective qualifier ἰσχυρόν implies an angel high in the hierarchy of supernatural beings in heaven.³⁹ Perhaps echoes of Daniel 4 are in the background here.⁴⁰ intentionally foregrounding these aspects of this episode.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 347.]

³⁸“The expression, ἄγγελον ἰσχυρόν, ‘mighty angel,’ occurs three times in Revelation (5:2; 10:1; 18:21), where it seems to refer to three different angelic beings. Similar descriptions of such supernatural beings occur in the magical papyri: PGM III.71, ἄγγελον κραταιὸν καὶ ἰσχυρόν, ‘a strong and mighty angel’; cf. PGM I.172, ὁ κραταιὸς ἄγγελος, ‘the mighty angel.’ See Adam and Eve 40:2 (οἱ τρεῖς μεγάλοι ἄγγελοι); Paral. Jer. 4:1 (ὁ μέγας ἄγγελος). The phrase ‘mighty angel’ in Revelation seems to suggest a supernatural being relatively high in the angelic hierarchy; in 5:2 the mighty angel functions as a herald in the heavenly court; in 10:1 he brings a revelation of the nearness of the end; in 18:21 he performs a symbolic action by casting a millstone representing Babylon-Rome into the sea (though these three are not necessarily identical).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 347.]

³⁹“The Greek may merely mean a mighty or powerful angel, but it might also refer to the angel Gabriel, Hebrew for ‘God is my strength.’ Gabriel is the only angel, apart from Michael, mentioned in the protocanonical books of the OT. In Tobit, Raphael also appears. In Dan 8 the prophet prostrates himself before Gabriel, who teaches him the meaning of the vision which he received. In this vision a ram having two horns stood on the bank of a river. It encountered a he-goat, who had one great horn between its eyes but later received four horns, and a little horn grew from one of them. In Daniel’s vision, the ram with the two horns signified the kings of Media and Persia, and the he-goat, the king of Greece. The great horn was the first king, Alexander the Great.” [J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, vol. 38, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 85.]

⁴⁰“The portrayal of the angelic questioner in 5:2 (‘I saw a strong angel proclaiming in a great voice’) contains faint outlines of the angelic spokesman in Dan. 4:13–14, 23 (cf. Dan. 4:23 [LXX]: ‘he saw that an angel was sent in strength from the Lord’; 4:13–14 [LXX]: ‘behold, an angel was sent in strength from heaven and he cried out’; 4:13–14[10] [Theod.]: ‘a holy one came down from heaven and cried out in strength’).¹⁰²

“Not only are the descriptions of the two angels verbally alike, but they also have the same kind of role: the Danielic angel is the spokesman for the heavenly council and proclaims a decree of judgment followed by restoration with respect to Nebuchadnezzar; the angel in Revelation 5 is also the spokesman for the heavenly council and proclaims a divine decree of judgment and redemption with respect to the cosmos.¹⁰³ The implication of both proclamations in their contexts is that no created being, only God, possesses the worthiness and authority to be sovereign over history and to be able to execute his cosmic plan. That this Daniel 4 background is in mind here is understandable since the same context of Daniel 4 was influential in the preceding verses (Rev. 4:9–11; note the clearer allusions to the Daniel 4 angel in Rev. 10:1, 3–4, in a chapter which has numerous other parallels with the vision in Revelation 4–5).”

The identity of the angel has intrigued commentators for many centuries, but in truth no name was given to this angel simply because John felt it unimportant to name him.⁴¹

The angel functions as a herald (κηρύσσοντα ἐν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ) posing the issue of worthiness to open the book. His speaking ἐν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ, in a loud voice, stresses the formal announcement nature of his message.⁴²

The issue here is presented as τίς ἄξιος ἀνοίξει τὸ βιβλίον καὶ λύσει τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ; *Who is worthy to open the book and untie its seals?* The sense of ἄξιος, *worthiness*, is based upon one who qualifies to trigger the implementation of the divine will contained in the scroll. Only one with divine credentials can qualify. And that will be Christ alone among the individuals in heaven.

Notice the objective in unrolling the scroll. It is not to read the contents. Rather, worthiness qualifies one ἀνοίξει τὸ βιβλίον καὶ λύσει τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ, *to open the scroll, and to untie its seals*. Then when opened the contents can be seen (v. 4): βλέπειν αὐτό. The mechanical process of opening -- as explained earlier in the **Internal History** section -- was simply to untie the cord around that section of the scroll from the rock seal that it was attached to.



The dramatic tension increases when the ques-

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 338.]

⁴¹“The identity of the powerful angel has intrigued many commentators (a similar angel will appear with a little scroll at 10:1, and at 18:21 with a millstone symbolising fallen Babylon). Given the angelomorphic description of the son of man figure in Revelation 1, one might be tempted to identify the powerful angel here with Christ; yet Jesus is about to appear, though in a different guise, in a few verses. More likely he is one of the principal angels such as Michael, Metatron or Yahoel (e.g. Dan. 10:13; 3 En. 1:4; Apoc. Abr. 10:3), especially exalted heavenly beings who appear in Jewish apocalypses to perform particular tasks as God’s representative (the angel of Dan. 4:13 LXX may have been the immediate influence). Perhaps he is Jesus’ own angel (see 1:1, and on 10:1). Yet John is not concerned to identify him further at this point: however exalted this heavenly being is, his identity is apparently insignificant beside the one who is now about to appear on the scene.” [Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 2006), 96.]

⁴²“ἐν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ: again in 14:7, 9, 15. Without ἐν in 5:12, 6:10, 7:2, 10, 8:13, 10:3, etc. Contrast the non-Johannine ἐν ἰσχυρῷ φωνῇ in 18:2.” [R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1920), 135.]

tion is raised by the angel, and no one immediately steps forward to open the scroll.

The dilemma of worthiness: vv. 3-4. 3 καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ οὐδὲ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐδὲ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον οὔτε βλέπειν αὐτό. 4 καὶ ἔκλαιον πολὺ, ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἄξιος εὐρέθη ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον οὔτε βλέπειν αὐτό. 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 bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

The angel's question seeking someone worthy launches a huge search. The phrase οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο, no one was able, is couched in the imperfect tense that emphasizes an extended search in past time. John's use of the imperfect tense both here with ἐδύνατο and also with ἔκλαιον, was weeping, in the context of a series of Aorist tense verbs -- εἶδον (vv. 1-2); εὐρέθη (v 4) -- signals a narrative perspective of looking back to the moment of his vision and seeing the details both as event oriented and extended process oriented. What he saw (εἶδον) in the moment of the vision was an angel conducting an extended search (κηρύσσοντα) but without finding someone worthy (ἐδύνατο), and that in turn triggered an extended weeping (ἔκλαιον) by John as increasingly the search was futile.

The search for someone worthy was conducted ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ οὐδὲ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐδὲ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς, in heaven, nor upon the earth nor under the earth.⁴³ The

⁴³“The striking and disappointing conclusion of the universal search for someone worthy to open the sealed book is emphasized here. All of the achievements of all of the priests and prophets of the world do not adequately qualify them for opening this sealed book. Using this dramatic device, the author emphasizes the uniqueness of the conquest of Christ, which he mentions in v 5. Only here and in v 13 is the three-level cosmos of heaven, earth, and underworld mentioned in Revelation (in v 13 the sea is added), though in vv 3, 13 the emphasis is on the beings who populate each of these three zones. The comprehensive way of referring to each of the three major zones of the cosmos is a way of saying ‘nowhere in the entire universe’ (cf. Houtman, *Himmel*, 36–37). The same three divisions of the cosmos are mentioned in the context of the well-known Christ hymn in Phil 2:10, ‘every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth [ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων],’ and a similar conception occurs within a creedal context in Ignatius Trall. 9:1, ‘those in heaven and on earth and under the earth [τῶν ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ ὑποχθονίων].’ Both of these passages emphasize the denizens of the three-level cosmos (primarily supernatural beings), as in Rev 5:3, 13. In the T. Sol. 16:3, Beelzeboul is referred to as the ruler of the spirits of the air and the earth and beneath the earth. The tendency in ancient Roman prayer to be as inclusive as possible often led to the formulation of such phrases as *dique omnes caelestes vosque, terrestres, vosque, inferni, audite*, ‘hear, all you gods of heaven, of earth, and you of the underworld’ (Livy 1.32.10). The same cosmic structure is found throughout the ancient Near East and is reflected in the Egyptian Hymn to the Nile, which refers to ‘every god, be he in the underworld, in heaven, or upon earth’ (ANET, 372–73).

concept of a three tier cosmos expressed here is rather common in the ancient world both inside and outside the Bible. The search for someone worthy was made as exhaustively as possible. And without positive results.

John even while the search is taking place begins to weep greatly (ἔκλαιον πολὺ) as he realizes no one is being discovered (οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο) to be worthy. The conclusion of the search is empty as οὐδεὶς ἄξιος εὐρέθη asserts.

The details of the futile search by the angel and John's deep disappointment stand as unique in the visionary literature. In those instances of a sealed heavenly scroll (cf. Isa. 19:11; Dan. 12:4, 9 in Theod. text; 1 Enoch 89:71 et als) no search for someone worthy to open the scroll is conducted. The value of these details is to heighten the importance of the scroll and to set the stage for the discovery of someone worth, Christ Himself.⁴⁴

Though the phrase ‘under the earth’ does not occur elsewhere in Revelation, the related conception ‘abyss’ (which sometimes means ‘ocean’; cf. 13:1 with 11:7 and 17:8) is found in Rev 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3, though it is never coordinated with the other divisions of the cosmos except implicitly in 20:1, which describes an angel who descends from heaven (to earth) with a key to the abyss.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 348.]

⁴⁴“The reason for John's weeping is that a book is sealed. If the space in which we find ourselves is a throne room and if the figure seated on the throne is the king, then the book he holds in his hand must be a royal decree. A biblical analog might be the edict issued by Cyrus of Persia, in which he gave the Judean exiles permission to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1–4; 5:13). But since the ruler in this case is not just any king but the King, the Lord of hosts, then the content of the seven-sealed scroll can be nothing but the divine will. The scroll both symbolizes and embodies God's intention to execute justice ‘on earth as it is in heaven.’ It entails the setting right of all that is wrong in human history, the defeating of the demonic powers who seek to frustrate God's purpose, and the establishment of that city in which the horrors of all merely human cities will be overcome.

“How will all this be accomplished? Until the scroll is opened, no one knows; as Paul puts it, this is precisely ‘the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things’ (Eph. 3:9). Nor is it simply the case that God wills for this plan to be revealed, but rather he wills that it be executed by a creature, and more particularly a human creature, for the divine covenant (the rainbow again!) is specifically with Noah and his descendants. Jacques Ellul writes that the scroll can only be

the book of that which man is called by his Father to be, to do, and to become (this is why it is held out to all men)... This man is both the heir of God and engaged in a process by which he becomes himself, which is to say, a history.... It is the book of the secrets and of the meaning of human history, both accomplished, assured, but incomprehensible, illegible, which on the other hand is disclosed as a succession of time, which is in fact to fill all time. This book contains then the secret of the history of men, of humanity; but this secret is inevitably the disclosure of the profound forces of this history and, much more, of the action of God in the history of men. This

One note: in both the search (v. 3) and the disappointment of John (v. 4) the objective of the search is the same: ἀνοίξαι τὸ βιβλίον οὔτε βλέπειν αὐτό. First, the Aorist infinitive with event emphasis ἀνοίξαι τὸ βιβλίον, *to open the scroll*. Then the present infinitive with ongoing process emphasis βλέπειν αὐτό, *to be seeing it*. The intention was not to open the scroll and read it. But rather in the visionary mode of John's experience, when each section is opened by untying a seal the contents leap off the scroll in pictorial animation as chapters six and seven dramatically depict. The words written on the scroll (βιβλίον γεγραμμένον ἔσωθεν καὶ ὄπισθεν, 5:1) come alive as visual images in animation rather than in static form. John did not see words but instead animated pictures of horses and riders leaping off the scroll and flying down to earth to do their work. Note the repetition of εἶδον, *I saw*, in 6:1, 2, 9; 7:1, 2; 8:2).

is why there is mention of the throne (the place where God reigns and pronounces his decision) and why it is sealed by the Spirit (the plan of God for man is realized by the Spirit and it is that which gives meaning to all history). (1977: 145)

“This is a powerful reading. If it has a weakness, it is that his concentration on generalities such as ‘man’ and ‘history’ causes Elul to miss the Israel-specific character of the passage. In the Bible the human creature with whom God has dealings is not humanity in general, but Israel, the covenant people who are the representative of all peoples. The tears of Rachel, Mary, Jesus, and John himself are Jewish tears. The tears of Gentile mothers are not forgotten, but they are redeemed by being caught up in this uniquely messianic history. This lets us say something else important about the scroll: it is identical with the scroll that Daniel was told to seal up until the end, in that Old Testament apocalypse at once so Jewish in content, so Gentile in setting, and so eschatological in its concern with the end (Dan. 12:4).²

“If the scroll remains locked under its seven seals, there is finally no redemption, no relief for history's victims, no salvation for the Jews, no hope for the Gentiles. The modern project since the Enlightenment has been driven by the conviction that human beings hold the scroll of destiny in their own hands and that the redemption of history's victims lies in the future perfection of humankind — a perfection that the victims themselves, alas, will never have the chance to enjoy. In the postmodern world we now inhabit, the departure from the Christian narrative has proceeded a decisive step further. It is not that the scroll remains unopened, a view we might perhaps associate with the tragic sense of life, or that we ourselves can open it, as in the Enlightenment project. There is no scroll, no grand metanarrative tying everything together and holding out the hope that the angel of death will be stayed by the hand of a just, merciful God. In such a world all that would remain is a kind of practical muddling through in the face of death,³ or a resisting of death by invoking the power of love — ‘We must love one another or die,’ as W. H. Auden put it in his great poem ‘September 1, 1939.’ Yet in the absence of the God of Daniel and of Revelation it is deeply questionable whether our love can save us.⁴⁷

[Joseph L. Mangina, *Revelation*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), 85–87.]

The elder's solution to worthiness: v. 5. 5 καὶ εἶς ἐκ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων λέγει μοι· μὴ κλαῖε, ἰδοὺ ἐνίκησεν ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα, ἡ ρίζα Δαυὶδ, ἀνοίξαι τὸ βιβλίον καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ. 5 Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

When the angel's search for someone worthy ends without discovering anyone, one of the 24 elders comes to the rescue with his announcement that there is someone worthy after all. The specific identity of the elder who becomes their spokesman is not given, thus signaling the unimportance of his identity beyond his status in the heavenly court as an elder.

The reassuring words of the elder point to the solution of the dilemma of opening the scroll. First he tells John to stop crying: μὴ κλαῖε. Perhaps John's weeping is tied to the promise in 4:1 that Christ would show him the divine will: δεῖξω σοι ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα. But now after the angel's futile search it seems impossible that such is going to happen. But the elder's words assert that it is going to happen because someone is present in heaven who is qualified to open the scroll.

The identity of this person follows in dramatic imagery depicting the Messiah descendancy tradition in Judaism. First, John is to notice ἰδοὺ ἐνίκησεν ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα, *Indeed the lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered*. This clearly comes from Gen. 49:9 where Judah is labeled a lion.⁴⁵ It lays the foundation for understanding the Messiah coming from the tribe of Judah as a lion which was commonplace in both Jewish⁴⁶ and early Christian messianic expectation texts.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Gen. 49:9-10. 9 σκύμνος λέοντος Ἰουδα· ἐκ βλαστοῦ, υἱέ μου, ἀνέβης· ἀναπεσὼν ἐκοιμήθης ὡς λέων καὶ ὡς σκύμνος· τίς ἐγερεῖ αὐτόν;† 10 οὐκ ἐκλείψει ἄρχων ἐξ Ἰουδα καὶ ἡγούμενος ἐκ τῶν μηρῶν αὐτοῦ, ἕως ἂν ἔλθῃ τὰ ἀποκεείμενα αὐτῶ, καὶ αὐτὸς προσδοκία ἐθνῶν.†

9 Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness—who dares rouse him up? 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his.

⁴⁶“So Targ. Neof. and Targ. Ps.-J. of Gen. 49:9–12 and Midr. Tanhuma Gen. 12:12; Midr. Rab. Gen. 97; 4 Ezra 11:37; 12:31–32 (in combination with a reference to the “seed of David”); a similar combination with Gen. 49:10 occurs in IQSb 5.21–29; cf. possibly 1 Macc. 3:4–5.” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999).349 fn. 143]

⁴⁷“The motif of the Messiah as a lion occurs in early Judaism (see the lion in 4 Ezra 11:36–46, interpreted in 12:31–34) and early Christianity (Justin Dial. 52.2; Ps.-Epiphanius Test. 71.3). Judah is called a lion in Gen 49:9 (as is the tribe of Dan in Deut 33:22). In a Jewish inscription from Sardis dating to the late second century A.D., a tribe of Jews is called Λεόντιοι, ‘Leontioi’ (Robert, Sardes, 45–46; Lifshitz, Donateurs, no. 19), a name that Robert under-

This Lion ἐνίκησεν, **has conquered**. No direct object is used to specified precisely what has been conquered. Often in the 28 NT uses of the verb νικάω a direct object will be stated with the verb.⁴⁸ With Christ

stands as a way of referring to the tribe of Judah (Sardes, 47). Here the lion of the tribe of Judah, i.e., the Davidic Messiah (who turns out to be the slain Lamb of v 6), is the subject of the verb νικᾷν; elsewhere in Revelation it is only in 17:14 (a redactional passage) that the Lamb is the subject of the verb νικᾷν. Elsewhere in the NT, in John 16:33, Jesus says ‘I have conquered [νενίκηκα] the world,’ and in 1 Cor 15:57 Paul praises God ‘who gives us victory [νίκος] through our Lord Jesus Christ.’ In early Christian magic the νικᾷ acclamation, often expressed with the formula ‘Jesus Christ is victorious’ (Daniel-Malomini, Supplementum Magicum, no. 25), occurs frequently, often in an exorcistic context (Peterson, Εἰς Θεος, 152–63; H. Heinen, ‘Eine neue alexandrinische Inschrift und die mitteralterlichen laudes regiae,’ in *Romanitas-Christianitas*, ed. G. Wirth [Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 1982] 683 n. 17).’’

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 350.]

^{48c}νικάω (Hom.+; ins, pap, LXX; PsSol 4:10; TestJob 27:5; Test12Patr, Philo, Joseph., Just., Tat.; Ath. 3, 2) ptc. νικῶν, dat. νικῶντι or νικούντι (so some edd. **Rv 2:17**, in part also vs. **7**; on this exchange of-άω and-έω forms s. B-D-F §90; W-S. §13, 26; Rob. 203; s. Mlt-H. 195); fut. νικήσω; 1 aor. ἐνίκησα; pf. νενίκηκα. Pass.: 1 fut. inf. νικηθήσεσθαι (Just., D. 78, 9); 1 aor. ἐνικήθην LXX, ptc. νικηθείς; pf. inf. νενικῆσθαι 4 Macc 13:2.

1. to win in the face of obstacles, be victor, conquer, overcome, prevail, intr.

a. in a battle or contest (EpArist 281); of *Israel* as victorious in battle 12:2 (cp. Ex 17:11); of *Christ* **Rv 3:21b**; **5:5** (the foll. inf. ἀνοῖξαι indicates what the victory enables the victor to do). ἐξῆλθεν νικῶν κ. ἵνα νικήσῃ **6:2**. Of *the good athlete* (Lucian, Tim. 50; POxy 1759, 4 letter to an athlete) IPol 3:1. *The Christian as ὁ νικῶν the one who is victorious* (s. B-D-F §322; Rob. 865) **Rv 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7** (s. Boll 49, 1). οἱ νικῶντες ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου (=τηρήσαντες ἑαυτοὺς ἐκ τ. θ.—B-D-F §212; GBonaccorsi, Primi saggi di filologia neotest. I ’33 p. clxii) **15:2**.—Hs 8, 3, 6 v.l.

b. in a legal action (Aristoph., Equ. 95, Av. 445; 447; Protagoras in Diog. L. 9, 56 [νικάω and νίκη]; Artem. 1, 35 p. 36, 20; 4, 31 p. 222, 17 al.; PSI 551, 7 [III B.C.] ἐνίκων τῇ κρίσει; PHal 1, 51; 58 [III B.C.]; Jos., Bell. 2, 284, Ant. 12, 126) ὅπως ... και νικήσεις (v.l. νικήσης) ἐν τῷ κρίνεσθαι σε that you may win when you are accused **Ro 3:4**; 1 Cl 18:4 (both Ps 50:6.—IG XI/4, 1299, 26f [c. 200 B.C.] Sarapis and his worshipers win in a lawsuit over a new temple [Eng. tr. in Danker, Benefactor, no. 27]).

2. to overcome someone, vanquish, overcome, trans.

a. act. w. the obj. in the acc. τινά overcome someone (Polyb. 6, 58, 13; Diod S 4, 57, 6; Jos., Vi. 81) **Lk 11:22; Rv 11:7; 13:7; 17:14**. Of *Christ* νενίκηκα τὸν κόσμον I have overcome the world (i.e. the sum total of everything opposed to God; s. κόσμος 7b) **J 16:33b** (v. τι=‘be stronger than’: IAndros Isis, Kyme 55 p. 124). Also said of *Christians* **1J 5:4f**; cp. αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ νίκη ἡ νικήσασα τὸν κόσμον vs. **4b** (s. νίκη). Also v. τὸν πονηρόν overcome the evil one, the devil **2:13f** (on this passage and **J 16:33b** s. JBrunns, JBL 86, ’67, 451–53); cp. **Rv 12:11**. αὐτόν (=τὸν διάβολον) Hs 8, 3, 6. αὐτοὺς (=τοὺς ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου) **1J 4:4**. v. τὴν ψυχὴν win a victory over the soul (i.e. the earthly-minded part of man; cp. Sextus 71a νικά τὸ σῶμα) 2 Cl 16:2. The conquering power added in the dat.: by (means of) ἐν τινι (Pla., Symp. 213e; Himerius, Or. [Ecl.] 3, 11

as the subject of νικάω, the direct objects include τὸν κόσμον, **the world** (John 16:33b; 1 John 4:4; cf. 1 Jhn 5:4b) and the δέκα βασιλεῖς, **ten kings**, fighting Christ under the authority of the beast (Rev. 17:12–14). But here with the verb used intransitively, i.e., without an object, the point is to stress absolute victory over any and all foes. The Lion’s victory is total.

And He also is ἡ ῥίζα Δαυὶδ, **the root of David**. An expanded form of this title for Christ surfaces in Rev. 22:16,

Ἐγὼ Ἰησοῦς ἔπεμψα τὸν ἄγγελόν μου μαρτυρῆσαι ὑμῖν ταῦτα ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. **ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ῥίζα καὶ τὸ γένος Δαυὶδ**, ὁ ἀστὴρ ὁ λαμπρὸς ὁ πρωϊνός.

It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. **I am the root and the descendant of David**, the bright morning star.

As affirmed here, the idea of a ῥίζα, **root**, equals that of a γένος, **descendant**. And this is how the text has been understood over the centuries. The source for this concept comes out of Isaiah 11:1–10, καὶ ἐξελεύσεται ῥάβδος ἐκ τῆς ῥίζης Ἰεσσαί, καὶ ἄνθος ἐκ τῆς ῥίζης ἀναβήσεται, **A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots** (v. 1). Clearly this text is Messianic in nature, and points to the coming Messiah as a descendant of Jesse, David’s father.⁴⁹

ἐν δόγμασι νικῶν ἐκείνους): ἐν τῷ μὴ ποιεῖν τὰς ἐπιθυμίας αὐτῆς τὰς πονηράς by not carrying out its base desires 2 Cl 16:2. v. ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ τὸ κακὸν overcome evil with good **Ro 12:21b** (TestBenj 4:3 οὗτος τὸ ἀγαθὸν ποιῶν νικᾷ τὸ κακόν).

b. pass. be conquered, beaten (Thu. 1, 76, 2 al.; Posidippus [III B.C.]: 447 Fgm. 2 Jac. νικάται ὁ Κύπριος τῷ σχήματι=the Cyprian is ‘conquered’ by the picture [of Aphrodite] et al.; Philo, De Jos. 200 νικώμενος ὑπὸ πάθους; Jos., Ant. 1, 302 by the force of necessity; Tat. 9, 2 ὁ νικώμενος νῦν εἰσαυτίς ἐπικρατεῖ εἰώθεν; Theoph. Ant. 2, 12 [p. 130, 30] θεὸν γὰρ οὐ χρῆ ὑφ’ ἡδονῆς νικάσθαι) Hm 12, 5, 2. ὁ πονηρὸς ... νικηθείς AcPICor 2:15. Let oneself be overcome μὴ νικῶ ὑπὸ τ. κακοῦ **Ro 12:21a**; Dg 7:7.

3. to surpass in ability, outstrip, excel, trans. w. the superior power added in the dat. (cp. Eur., Herc. Fur. 342 ἀρετῇ; Ael. Aristid. 13 p. 272 D.: ἐπικρατεῖ; Tat. 15:4 θανάτῳ ... τὸν θάνατον νενικήκασιν) τοῖς ἰδίοις βίοις νικῶσι τ. νόμους in their way of life they surpass (or outdo) the laws (i.e., they live better lives than the laws require) Dg 5:10.—DELG s.v. νίκη. M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 673.]

^{49c}In the phrase ‘the Root of David,’ ‘root’ (מִשְׁמַח *šemaḥ*) is used in a royal or messianic sense found earlier in OT prophetic literature (Maurer, TDNT 6:985–90). The messianic term ῥίζα, ‘root,’ is also used in Rev 22:16 in the phrase ἡ ῥίζα καὶ τὸ γένος Δαυὶδ, ‘the root and offspring of David.’ The coming new king from the house of David was called מִשְׁמַח *šemaḥ*, ‘Branch,’ in Jer 23:5 (LXX ἀνατολή); 33:15 (omitted in MT); Zech 3:8 (Greek ἀνατολή); 6:12 (ἀνατολή); 4Q252 = 4QGenesis Peshar 5:3–4 (דור מִשְׁמַח דָּוִד מִיְשׁוּבָה עַד עַד בְּרוּךְ *ad bō*: *māšīaḥ haššedek šemaḥ dāwid*, ‘until the messiah of righteousness, the branch of David, comes’); 4Q285 7:1–4 (Isa 11:1 is interpreted to refer to the דָּוִד מִשְׁמַח *šemaḥ dawid*, ‘Branch

The consequence of this Root of David having conquered is His ability to ἀνοίξει τὸ βιβλίον καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ, *to open the scroll and its seven seals*. To be sure here, there is a certain illogic about the opening of the book first and then the seals. Logically the reverse sequence would be the correct procedure. But this assumes that a sequentially based procedure is present in the manner of the listing τὸ βιβλίον καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ, and this may very well not be the case. Very possibly the scroll is mentioned first due to its greater importance than the seals. After all, getting at what is written is on the scroll is the bottom line objective. Plus the phrase here ἀνοίξει τὸ βιβλίον καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ may very well be intended as a shortened form of the preceding phrase ἀνοίξει τὸ βιβλίον καὶ λῦσαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ, *to open the scroll and to untie*⁵⁰ *its seals*, in v. 2.

What is of much greater significance is the linking of the infinitive ἀνοίξει, *to open*, with the regular verb of David,⁵¹ referred to in Jeremiah and Zechariah). Two different terms for the Davidic king are used in a parallel couplet in Isa 11:1, ‘A shoot [ῥῆψ *hōter*; LXX ῥάβδος] shall come out from the stump of Jesse [ῥῆψ *ya geza*; *yišay*; LXX ἡ ῥίζα τοῦ Ἰεσσαί], and a branch [ῥαβ *nēser*; ἄνθος] shall grow out of his roots.’ Yet another term from the same semantic field, ῥῥῶ *šōreš*, ‘root,’ is used in Isa 11:10, ‘On that day the root of Jesse [ῥῆψ ῥῥῶ *šōreš* *yišay*; LXX ἡ ῥίζα τοῦ Ἰεσσαί] shall stand as a signal to the peoples.’ This motif was derived from early Jewish messianic tradition (4Q174 = 4QFlor 1–3 i 12; 4QPatriarchal Blessings 3–4 [interpreting Gen 49:10]; 4QpIsaa 3:15–22; 4Q285 7:1–4; T. Judah 24:4–6; Sir 47:22; 4 Ezra 12:32 [‘from the offspring of David’ is absent from the Latin MSS but present in the Syriac, Ethiopic, and Arabic MSS; see B. Violet, *Die Esra-Apokalypse* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1910–24) 1:356–57]; Tg. Isa. 11:1, 10), which was the source for its use in early Christianity (Rom 15:12; Justin 2 *Apol*; 32.12–13; Dial. 52.2; 86.4; *Apost. Const.* 6.11; Hippolytus *De antichristo* 8; Ps.-Epiphanius Test. 5.23, 27; Victorinus Comm. in Apoc. 2 [ed. Haussleiter, Victorinus, 62–63]). The emphases on the tribe of Judah and on Davidic descent together underline one of the crucial qualifications of the Jewish royal Messiah: he must be a descendant of the royal house of David (Pss. Sol. 17:21; Mark 12:35–37; John 7:42), sometimes conceived as David redivivus (Jer 23:5; 30:9). Descent from the tribe of Judah (Heb 7:14), and more specifically the Davidic descent of Jesus, is frequently mentioned in the NT and early Christian literature (Matt 1:1, 6; Luke 1:32, 69; 2:4; 3:31; Acts 2:30–32; 13:22–23; Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8; Ignatius Eph. 18:2; 20:2; Rom. 17:3; Smyrn. 1:1), and he is frequently called ‘son of David’ (Matt 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; Mark 10:47–48; 12:35; Luke 18:38–39; Barn. 12:10).’’

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 350–351.]

⁵⁰The typical English translation of λῦσαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ as “to break its seals” is incorrect. The false assumption that the seals were wax seals lies behind this wrong translation pattern. In reality wax based seals did not come into existence until many centuries after this era. What λῦσαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ is literally implying is “to untie its seals” since the seals were made of stone or bone with holes where strings tied up the scroll using the seals and had to be untied before the scroll could be opened.

ἐνίκησεν, *has conquered*. This Aorist verbal result infinitive defines the consequence of Christ having conquered. His victory over His enemies qualifies Him to untie the seals and open the scrolls so that its contents are revealed to others. What has been eternally hidden in the divine will can now be made known to the people of God by the opening of the scroll.

B. The Lamb is worthy! vv. 6-7

6 Καὶ εἶδον ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζῶων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἀρνίον ἐστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον ἔχων κέρατα ἑπτὰ καὶ ὀφθαλμοὺς ἑπτὰ οἳ εἰσιν τὰ [ἑπτὰ] πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεσταλμένοι εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν. 7 καὶ ἦλθεν καὶ εἴληφεν ἐκ τῆς δεξιᾶς τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου.

6 Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne.⁵¹

The solution to no one being worthy is now realized with the sudden appearance of the Lamb standing between the throne and the two sets of individuals surrounding the throne.

The worthiness of the Lamb: v. 6. 6 Καὶ εἶδον ἐν

⁵¹“How we interpret the entire Apocalypse depends on how we interpret the scene that now lies before us. In effect, there are three options. (1) The scene could be viewed as Christ’s assuming of a mask, so that his true lionlike character is hidden for a time in the form of lowliness. This suggests that at the second coming he will once more become the lion and destroy his enemies. (2) It could be viewed in terms of an ontological kenosis, in which Christ, who as God’s Son had actually been powerful, renounces his power in favor of love. This interpretation suggests a kind of Marcionism, according to which the vindictive God of the Old Testament is superseded by — or possibly discovers his true identity as — the New Testament God of love. (3) Or the scene is a kind of diptych, in which each of the two panels interprets the other, but where the priority belongs to the second panel. Christ really is and never ceases to be the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He is indeed a figure of power, but his power is realized precisely in the self-giving love he displays at the cross. In favor of this last view is the Apocalypse’s consistent description of Christ as victor while at the same time using “lamb” as the dominant christological image; the word *arnion* appears twenty-nine times in Revelation, twenty-eight times in reference to Jesus Christ (at 13:11 it refers to the beast who mimics Christ’s appearance).

“This third possibility is the one we should follow. It is well stated by Vernard Eller: ‘The Lamb’s very defenselessness is his lion-like strength; his suffering death is his victory; his *modus operandi* ... always is that of the Lamb, but the consequences, the results, always are a victory that belongs to the character of the Lion’ (1974: 80, emphasis original). The Lamb embodies the triumph of life; he is slaughtered, but stands and lives: ‘I died, and behold I am alive forevermore’ (1:18).’’

[Joseph L. Mangina, *Revelation*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), 87–88.]

μέσω τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἀρνίον ἐστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον ἔχων κέρατα ἑπτὰ καὶ ὀφθαλμούς ἑπτὰ οἱ εἰσὶν τὰ [ἑπτὰ] πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεσταλμένοι εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν. 6 Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

The positioning of the Lamb has important symbolism: εἶδον ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἀρνίον ἐστηκὸς.⁵² Although the precise location of the Lamb in reference to the throne of God is not very clear, it seems that he is somewhere close to the throne and in front of the living creatures and the elders. As verse seven makes clear with ἦλθεν καὶ εἴληφεν, *he came and took...*, the Lamb was clearly not on the throne along side God to begin with. Standing between God and the elders in particular as well as the four creatures reflects the need of mediation between God and His creation -- something only the Lamb can do.

The attributes ascribed to the Lamb are highly significant to the symbolical role of the ἀρνίον, *Lamb*, itself. The dramatic shift in depiction of Christ first as a lion, ὁ λέων, and a root, ἡ ῥίζα, in v. 5 to that of a Lamb, ἀρνίον, forcefully remind us of the symbolic nature of this depiction. How Christ could be all three simultaneously is materially impossible.⁵³ Only in apocalyptic

⁵²“The way in which the location of the Lamb is described as ‘in the midst of’ the throne and the four cherubim and ‘in the midst of’ the twentyfour elders is problematic and can be understood in two ways: (1) ἐν μέσῳ can refer to a position in the middle of an area and mean ‘in the middle’ or ‘in the midst’ (Louw-Nida, § 83.10). Thus BAGD, 570, suggests the translation ‘on the center of the throne and among the four living creatures.’ Therefore, if the two ἐν μέσῳ phrases are parallel, it could indicate that the Lamb is at the center of everything described, as in 7:17 (Bousset [1906] 257). This seems unlikely, however, since the narrator says that the Lamb ‘came and took’ the scroll from the one seated on the throne (v 7), suggesting that he was somewhat removed from the throne of God. Glasson has suggested that this throne is a dais with more than one occupant, as elsewhere in Revelation (43–44; Giesen, 58). (2) ἐν μέσῳ can refer to the interval between two things, reflecting the Hebrew idiom בין בין *bên ûbên*, found in Lev 27:12, translated ἀνά μέσον καὶ ἀνά μέσον in the LXX, and so can mean that the position of the Lamb is ‘between’ the throne and the four cherubim, on the one hand, and the elders, on the other (Charles, 1:140; Delebecque, 182), or between the elders and the middle of the throne, i.e., the four cherubim. (3) ἐν μέσῳ can also refer to a position within an area occupied by other objects and mean ‘among, with’ (Louw-Nida, § 83.9). According to this view, which is probably the correct one, the Lamb would be standing in close proximity to the throne.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 351–352.]

⁵³For the problems that this causes artists in seeking to visually depict the scene in paintings one only has to observe the huge diversity of approaches, all of which emphasize one trait to the di-

visionary portrayal is such possible. The significance of Christ as a ἀρνίον highlights His messianic role as Savior and Lord.⁵⁴

Three significant features of this Lamb set it apart with distinction.

First, the Lamb is ἐστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον, *standing as having been slaughtered*. How strange! A slaughtered lamb should be lying down, but this Lamb is standing up. Rev. 14:1 contains a somewhat similar image.⁵⁵ But even more important is the apocalyptic visionary tradition. God can stand while everyone else in heaven is seated. But when God sits down everyone else stands *up before His throne*.⁵⁶ Additionally, and perhaps more

minishing of the other two. Only in modern graphic art does something remotely similar become possible with an animated graphic continually looping in a morphing pattern between a lion, a root, and a lamb. But in the apocalyptic vision here Christ was all three at the same time.

⁵⁴“The term ἀρνίον, ‘lamb,’ occurs twenty-nine times in Revelation (all references to Jesus with the exception of 13:11) and is the most frequent title for Jesus (for a full discussion of ἀρνίον and theories of its origin, see Excursus 5A: Christ as the Lamb). As a title or designation for Jesus, ἀρνίον was a contribution of the author even though he made use of a number of traditional motifs in designating this eclectic figure as the ἀρνίον. The two main constituent traditions that stand behind the figure of Christ as the Lamb are the lamb as ruler or leader and the lamb as a sacrificial metaphor (see Excursus 5A). The figure of the Lamb first appears in Revelation here in v 6, and vv 5–6 capture the two complementary aspects of this apocalyptic metaphor, namely, Jesus as the conquering Messiah (v 5) and Jesus as the atoning sacrificial victim (v 6). This dual presentation of the salvific function of Jesus as the crucified Messiah, i.e., in terms of a *theologia crucis*, ‘theology of the cross,’ and a *theologia gloriae*, ‘theology of glory,’ pervades various phases of early Christianity, including the Gospel of Mark, the letters of Paul, and the Fourth Gospel. While this ‘irony of kingship through crucifixion’ (L. L. Thompson, *Revelation*, 48–40, 65) is certainly a central theological emphasis here in Rev 5, it is a marginal conception elsewhere in the book (cf. 1:7; 19:13). In 1 Cor 1:23–24, Paul emphasizes these same two antithetical features of the role of Jesus: ‘We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.’” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 352.]

⁵⁵Rev. 14:1. Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ τὸ ἀρνίον ἐστὸς ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος Σιών καὶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἑκατὸν τεσεράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες ἔχουσαι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ γεγραμμένον ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν.

Then I looked, and *there was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion!* And with him were one hundred forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.

⁵⁶“That the Lamb is “standing” is a significant detail in the narrative (the Lamb is also described as ‘standing’ on Mount Zion; see Comment on 14:1), which contrasts with the description of the twenty-four elders seated on thrones (see Comment on 4:4). In Revelation the heavenly beings are occasionally described as standing before the throne of God (7:9, 11; 8:2). This coheres with a widespread rabbinic notion (with roots in the OT) that only God was allowed to be seated in heaven and that all who entered the

importantly, the ἑστηκός (i.e., standing equals being alive) corresponds to ἐνίκησεν, *he has conquered*, in v. 5. Indeed previously this Lamb was slaughtered, ὡς ἐσφαγμένον. The perfect tense participle stresses the past action with continuing consequence. This theme shows up in 5:12 and 13:8 also.⁵⁷ The Lamb was sacrificed as an offering to God in behalf of humanity.⁵⁸ In

heavenly court or surrounded the throne had to stand (1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chr 18:18; Isa 6:2; Jer 23:18, 22; Dan 7:10; Gk. 1 Enoch 14:22; 2 Apoc. Bar. 21:6; 48:10; T. Abr. [Rec. A] 4:5; 8:1; 9:7; 15:11; 16:3; T. Levi 2:10; b. Hag. 15a; y. Ber. 2c.23; Pesiq. R. 22:6; Gen. Rab. 65:21; Lev. Rab. 6:3; 3 Enoch 18:24). Further, Israelite priests and other worshipers are often described as ‘standing’ before the Lord (Deut 10:8; 17:12; 18:5, 7; 1 Sam 1:26; Pss 24:3; 134:1; 135:2; Jer 7:10; 15:1; 15:19; 1 Esdr 8:90; Jdt 4:14; 1 Macc 7:36). The statement that the Lamb is ‘standing’ may be an oblique reference to the resurrection of Jesus, perhaps already alluded to in v 5, where it is said that ‘he has conquered.’ Rulers are often depicted as seated, while those around them are standing (1 Kgs 22:10, 19; Neh 2:6; Esth 5:1–2; Jer 36:21; Dan 1:5, 19; 2:2), and the protocol associated with the royal court was undoubtedly applied to the descriptions of priestly service and the service of angelic beings in the heavenly court.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 352–353.]

⁵⁷**Rev. 5:12.** λέγοντες φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· ἄξιόν ἐστιν τὸ ἄρνιον τὸ ἐσφαγμένον λαβεῖν τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχὺν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν καὶ εὐλογίαν.

chanting with full voice, “Worthy is the Lamb *that was slaughtered* to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!

Rev. 13: 8. καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, οὗ οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τῷ ἄρνιῳ τῷ ἐσφαγμένῳ ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου.

and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of *the Lamb that was slaughtered*.

⁵⁸“The phrase ‘the slaughtered Lamb’ is also found in 5:12; 13:8. Here the fact that the adjectival participle ἐσφαγμένον, ‘slaughtered,’ is introduced with the comparative particle ὡς, ‘as, like,’ does not mean that the Lamb only appeared to have been slaughtered but rather that the Lamb had been slaughtered and was now alive, thus combining the two theological motifs of death and resurrection. The phrase ὡς ἐσφαγμένον is also used of one of the heads of the Beast from the Sea in 13:3, perhaps intended by the author as a negative counterpart to Christ. The basic term for sacrifice in the OT is שָׁחַט *zābah*, meaning ‘to slaughter’ (see TWAT 2:509–31), though σφάζειν is only used twice in the LXX to translate שָׁחַט *zābah* (Lev 17:5; Ezek 34:3). The slaughtered Lamb suggests a background in the Jewish Passover festival (N. Hillier, *EvQ* 39 [1967] 228–36), while references to ‘the blood of the Lamb’ (7:14; 12:11; see Comment on 7:14), to ‘his [Jesus] blood’ (1:5), and to ‘your [Jesus] blood’ (5:9) suggest a background in the blood ritual of Israelite-Jewish expiatory sacrifice (Daly, *Origins*, 25–35; id., *Christian Sacrifice*, 87–138); see the more extended discussion in Excursus 5A: Christ as the Lamb. The conception of the death of Jesus as analogous to the sacrifice of the Passover lamb is mentioned as early as Paul (1 Cor 5:7; see 1 Pet 1:19; Justin Dial. 111.3) and is a notion that achieves central significance in the theology of the Fourth Gospel, where Jesus is expressly designated “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29, 36). The Fourth Evangelist even

the background lies the Jewish Passover sacrifice of the lamb for covenant Israel and the cleansing of its sins. In early Christianity Jesus as the Sacrificial Lamb of God in the tradition of Isaiah 53 is an important theme for the Gospel message of salvation for all humanity.⁵⁹

Second, the Lamb has ἔχων κέρατα ἑπτὰ, *having seven horns*. The image of a messianic lamb possessing horns as symbols of power is found in the Jewish apocalyptic traditions, e.g., 1 Enoch 90 and the Testament of Joseph 19.⁶⁰ The likely source for this imag-

alters the chronology of Passion week so that Jesus is crucified precisely when the Passover lambs are slaughtered in the temple on 14 Nisan (John 19:14). The reference in Isa 53:7 to the servant of the Lord who is ‘led like a lamb to the slaughter’ (ὡς πρόβατον ἐπὶ σφαγὴν ἤχθη, which may be alluded to in the phrase ἄρνιον ἑστηκός ὡς ἐσφαγμένον) is frequently applied to the trial and execution of Jesus (Acts 8:32; Barn. 5:2; 1 Clem 16:7; Justin Dial. 72.3; 114.2). Malina has argued improbably that the vision of the Lamb was based on the constellation Aries, a lamb/ram looking backward, as if its neck were broken, i.e., as if it were ‘slaughtered’ (Revelation, 78–79, citing Manilius *Astron* 1.263–64). However, lambs or rams were not slaughtered in the ancient world by breaking their necks (like poultry), and they are perfectly capable of looking behind themselves.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 353.]

⁵⁹“There are two different proposals for the background of the ‘slain Lamb.’ Some prefer to see it as a reference to the OT Passover lamb, while others favor Isa. 53:7: ‘he was led as a sheep to the slaughter’ (cf. Isa. 53:8ff.). However, neither should be excluded, since both have in common with the metaphorical picture in Rev. 5:6 the central function and significance of the sacrifice of a lamb, which accomplishes redemption and victory for God’s people.¹⁴⁷ The Isaiah 53 background especially highlights the atoning aspect of the lamb’s sacrificial death, as well as applying the metaphors of both ‘root’ (ρίζα; cf. Isa. 52:2 and Rev. 5:5) and ‘lamb’ (ἄμνος, LXX) to the sacrificial victim. In fact, ‘root’ occurs also in Isa. 11:1, 10, alluded to in Rev. 5:5, which may have inspired attraction to the same metaphor in 53:2.

“The Passover/Isaiah 53 backgrounds are also suggested by the use of ἄρνιον (‘lamb’), behind which could lie Aramaic *talía*, which means not only ‘lamb,’ but also ‘servant’ and ‘boy.’ If that is the case, then ἄρνιον would be a most suitable word to combine the Passover lamb with the servant lamb of Isaiah 53.¹⁴⁸ Somewhat similar to John’s combination, 4 Ezra 15:10 applies Isa. 53:7 to Israel’s suffering in Egypt: ‘my people is led like a flock to the slaughter’ (likewise pseudo-Philo 30:5). The sacrificial victim’s prophesied sinlessness in Isa. 53:9 partly underlies the ‘worthiness’ of Jesus in 5:9 (‘worthy are you ... because you were slain’).” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 351.]

⁶⁰**Testament of Joseph 19.** 19. Hear ye also, my children, the visions which I saw. There were twelve deer feeding, and the nine were divided and scattered in the land, likewise also the three. And I saw that from Judah was born a virgin wearing a linen garment, and from her went forth a Lamb, without spot, and on His left hand there was as it were a lion; and all the beasts rushed against Him, and the lamb overcame them, and destroyed them, and trod

ery of a sheep and horns is Daniel, where sheep and horns are prominent symbols of visionary power by God.⁶¹ The possessing of seven horns signals full or complete power and authority. No weakness is found in this Lamb!

Third, the Lamb also has ὀφθαλμούς ἑπτὰ οἳ εἰσὶν τὰ [ἑπτὰ] πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεσταλμένοι εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν, *seven eyes which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth*. A Lamb with seven eyes -- along with seven horns -- had to be a hideous looking creature. But these are apocalyptic visionary images, not real life pictures! The seven Spirits of God has already been linked to seven burning torches in front of the throne of God in 4:5, ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρὸς καιόμεναι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, ἃ εἰσὶν τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ, *in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God*. This reference plays off the initial specification in 1:4, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ, *and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne*.⁶² The seven eyes of the Lamb that are the seven Spirits of God signal the omniscience of God in knowing everything taking place. In the background of this lies Zechariah 4:2, 10, where the seven burning lamps before the throne are the seven eyes of God. Thus in addition to the horns and the eyes signifying the deity of the Lamb, they stress his complete power and knowledge as divine.

The composite image of Christ presented here

them under foot. And because of Him the angels rejoiced, and men, and all the earth. And these things shall take place in their season, in the last days. Do ye therefore, my children, observe the commandments of the Lord, and honour Judah and Levi; for from them shall arise unto you the Lamb of God, by grace saving all the Gentiles and Israel. For His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, which shall not be shaken; but my kingdom among you shall come to an end as a watcher's hammock, which after the summer will not appear.

⁶¹“That the Lamb has horns is best explained against the background of the Jewish tradition found in 1 En. 90 and Test. Jos. 19 concerning a conquering messianic lamb (though some see the latter text as a Christian interpolation). Yet even these two Jewish texts find their primary inspiration from Daniel.¹⁴⁹ The relation of the horns to νικάω (‘overcome’) and to the OT allusions to the conquering of the Messiah in v 5 provide a basis for viewing them as a continuation of the ‘messianic conqueror’ idea from v 5 (for ‘horns’ as representing power cf. Deut. 33:17; 1 Kgs. 22:11; Ps. 89:17; Dan. 7:7–8:24; 1 En. 90:6–12, 37). That the Lamb has seven horns signifies the fullness of his strength, since ‘seven’ is figurative for fullness elsewhere in the Apocalypse and in biblical literature.” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 351.]

⁶²Rev. 3:1. Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας:

These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars:

combines the essence of His role as Redeemer of lost humanity. As a Lion, He conquered His enemies by being slaughtered as a sacrificial Lamb. Alive now through resurrection after being slaughtered He lives in victory over the foes of heaven itself. He stands in the succession of David indeed as the promised Messiah of the people of God. Thus He, and He alone, stands fully qualified to take the scroll containing the eternal will of God and then disclose it to God's people.

The worthy actions of the Lamb, v. 7. 7 καὶ ἦλθεν καὶ εἴληφεν ἐκ τῆς δεξιᾶς τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου. 7 *He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne.*

Out of His being comes then the proper action regarding the heavenly scroll. John depicts this action rather dramatically with two verbs: ἦλθεν and εἴληφεν. The Aorist ἦλθεν from ἔρχομαι signals an approach to the throne. The perfect tense εἴληφεν from λαμβάνω underscores the action of receiving the scroll with implied consequence.

The Lamb was standing either on the sea of glass or else beside it when He moved to approach the throne. Later on the conquering saints of God will be pictured as standing either on or beside this sea ready to praise God for their victory over the beast (cf. 15:2).⁶³ They appear beside the Lamb who has provided them with their victory.⁶⁴ His move here to the throne foreshadows the affirmation of victory over the beast to be affirmed in the contents of the scroll.

When the Lamb nears the throne the scroll now is extended to Him from the right hand of God sitting on the throne. And He takes it from God. The scroll is offered to the Lamb through God's right hand of power and authority.⁶⁵ In this action the declaration of worthi-

⁶³Rev. 15:2. Καὶ εἶδον ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην μειγμένην πυρὶ καὶ τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνης αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ὑαλίνην ἔχοντας κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ.

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.

⁶⁴“The Lamb may be portrayed as standing on the sea or beside it, since both are directly before the divine throne (cf. 4:6; 5:6–7), and the saints “who had come off victorious from the beast ... [are] standing on the sea of glass’ (15:2). Therefore, the Lamb is on or by the sea to indicate that he has defeated the satanic beast in his own watery abode. Our understanding of the ‘sea’ in 4:6 and of the overall Danielic structure in chs. 4–5 makes this suggestion attractive.¹⁵⁵” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 354.]

⁶⁵“The center of the action is highlighted by using the perfect εἴληφεν, ‘took,’ which contrasts with the aorist, the characteristic background tense used in narratives. While the stereotypical seated

ness by the Lamb from one of the elders (v. 5) is affirmed in God's offering the scroll to the Lamb.

This will prompt the celebratory response in vv. 8-14 that we will examine in the next study.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

What a powerful image that John has painted for us in vv. 1-7. In the Heavenly drama unfolding in John's visionary experience, the greatness of God in chapter four of Revelation is followed immediately with a central focus upon Christ as the one who can and will disclose the eternal will of God to God's people.

Here John matches his magnificent picture of Christ as the eternal Logos of God in the prologue of his gospel (cf. Jhn. 1:1-18). In his gospel Christ is the eternal Glory of Almighty God who stands as the agent of divine creation and redemption from sin. Here Christ in terms of apocalyptic vision is both the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, and the sacrificed Lamb of offering whose victory over the forces of evil qualifies Him to disclose this eternal plan of God for redemption to God's people.

That eternal plan is presented to us in terms of a heavenly scroll. This is in no way some magical book predicting just the future. Rather, it contains the eternal will of God covering all of time and beyond. In traditional apocalyptic imagery drawn from both the OT prophets and the Jewish apocalyptic traditions, this heavenly scroll will reveal how God has been, is, and will interact with His creation in redemptive actions. What we will see from the contents of this scroll are timeless principles of God's redemptive actions in redeeming His fall-

figure holding a closed scroll in his right hand rests the scroll in his lap (Birt, Buchrolle, 86-89), probably the image in 5:1, this passage presupposes that the scroll is held in an extended right hand, for which there are also iconographical parallels (Birt, Buchrolle, 90). The reason for specifying the right hand is that the right hand had the positive cultural associations of success and fortune (Gornatowski, "Rechts," 45ff.), in contrast with the left hand, which had negative associations. Further, the right hand was the culturally accepted hand for giving and taking (Birt, Buchrolle, 82), a notion fossilized in the etymology of δεξιός, which is related both to δεξιόμα, 'to take with the right hand,' and to δέχομαι, 'to take, receive' (Frisk, Wörterbuch 1:366-67, 373-74). This suggests that the scroll is depicted as held in the right hand of God precisely because it is God's intention to give the scroll to another. Though there are no intentional verbal parallels, the author also depicts himself taking a scroll from the outstretched hand of the standing angel in 10:10. Gos. Truth 20.12 (probably not dependent on Revelation) speaks of Jesus who 'took that book,' which 'no one was able to take' (20.4), apparently referring to the destiny of Jesus. That a four-footed creature is depicted as 'taking' the sealed scroll from the hand of God indicates the perils of taking such imagery literally. Deut. Rab. 11.10 mentions that Moses 'received the Law from the right hand of God' (Freedman, Midrash Rabbah 7:185)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 354-355.]

en creation ruined by sin and rebellion from the people He created and placed on it. These actions cover all of time and eternity. To limit them to just the future is to rob the images of most of their deep and profound insights into God's redemptive working.

The very dramatic scene in 5:1-14, especially in vv. 1-7, highlights attention on the sole person who is qualified to disclose that eternal will of God to fallen but redeemed humanity.⁶⁶ That person is not the anticipated warrior messiah expected by the Jews. Indeed, He is the Lion of Judah and the Root of David. But His qualification to disclose the heavenly will comes not just from His kingly lineage, but rather primarily from being the slaughtered Lamb of sacrifice. It is this Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes who possesses the authority and knowledge of God Himself. And it is His being sacrificed that qualifies this resurrected, living Lamb to disclose the eternal will of God to God's redeemed people.

To the first readers in the seven churches of Asia such a picture sharply contrasted to the blasphemy of Christ coming out of the Jewish synagogues in several of these cities. How blinded and utterly misled were these synagogues about Christ! If they could see this vision of heaven given to John and then passed on to the seven churches, what a different image of Christ they would have. Praise God that we also have this image and can pass it on to non-believers around us.

⁶⁶Following the description of the serene magnificence of the throne room of God and the worship perpetually offered to God by heavenly beings (4:1-11), John's attention is drawn to a scroll with seven seals in the right hand of God (who is neither named nor described and throughout the entire scene remains remarkably passive). A brief drama then unfolds in which someone is sought who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll (vv 2-4). One function of the motif of the heavenly council is to commission an emissary (cf. Isa. 6:8, 'Whom can we send?'; 1 Kgs 22:20, 'Who will entice Ahab?'). John makes use of this motif when an angel asks 'Who is worthy to open the scroll?' (v 2). John weeps when no one is found, a conscious fiction representing the past perspective of Israel awaiting the Messiah. One of the elders tells John that the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:9), the Root of David (Isa 11:1, 10), i.e., the Messiah, has conquered and can therefore open the scroll (v 5). Yet John sees not a Lion but a Lamb, looking as though it had been slain (v 6). The striking contrast between the two images suggests the contrast between the type of warrior messiah expected by first-century Judaism and the earthly ministry of Jesus as a suffering servant of God (see Matt 11:2-6 = Luke 7:18-23). The central dramatic scene of this vision segment is the cosmic sovereignty that the Lamb is revealed to possess, and the scene focuses on his acceptance of the sealed scroll from the hand of the one seated on the throne, symbolizing the full investiture of the Lamb (v 8). This focal revelation is followed by expressions of hymnic joy chanted by the twenty-four elders (vv 9-10), by an innumerable host of angels (v 12), by all created beings throughout the cosmos (v 13), with a concluding 'amen' uttered by the four cherubim." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 373-374.]

