

CHAPTER 5

GOD'S SEALED BOOK

Chapter 5 is a continuation of the throne scene of chapter 4; the difference being that Christ takes his place on the throne with God. In this vision God holds a book sealed with seven seals (v. 1), and no man is worthy to open the book. The main theme of chapter 5 is to show that Christ was the only one who could open the book (v. 5). Verse 9 explains why: He had died for our sins and had redeemed us to God. He was slain for our sins; therefore, God gave him power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and blessings (v. 12). Because of this, all creatures in heaven and earth are to worship him (v. 13-14).

There are many ideas concerning the contents of this book. Although the contents are important and are revealed as the seven seals are loosed in 6:1-8:5, the significant point in this chapter is the actual opening of the book. The opening of this book is symbolic of Christ opening a new era to mankind. When Christ died on the cross, he opened a much better way for man. He brought in the gospel dispensation whereby man can have forgiveness of his sins. No man could do this because there was no one worthy to make the necessary sacrifice. It had to be a perfect sacrifice. This is why John wept (v. 4). At that time it appeared to John that this book could not be opened and man would remain in a state of sin. Therefore, as we study chapter 5, let us keep in mind that Christ's ability to open this book represents the giving of the new law which redeemed man to God.

The events of chapter 5 revolve around this book sealed with seven seals. The following comments have been made concerning the contents of this book? "This scroll is the book of the destiny of mankind"¹, "This is a book of the future of the world and of mankind."² "It is the New Covenant, since the New Covenant tells how God will save

the church, Israel, the world and the universe.”³ “Certainly, there is some bearing which the book had upon the mystery of redemption, and the long-secret device by which God would achieve it in the death of his Son.”⁴ Whatever the exact meaning of the book, it is used to show that God has put his Son in control of all things because he gave the supreme sacrifice for our sins.

In order to better understand the meaning of the sealed book, consider the following observations. In verse 1, God was holding the book in his right hand, showing that it was extremely important. It had writings on both sides, indicating a lengthy book full of information. It was sealed with seven seals. In first-century times, the most important books were sealed with several seals. The number “7,” being the divine number, indicates divine importance – the greatest of all.

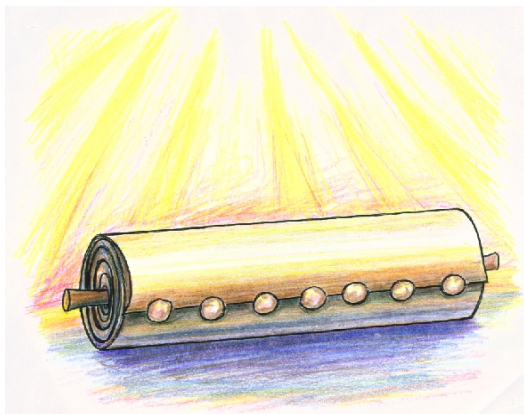
Verse 3 says that no “man” was worthy to open the book, in fact, no man could even look at it. John wept because no one could open the book, but he was immediately told that Christ had prevailed to open it. This indicated that Christ had done something which no other being had done thereby becoming worthy to open the book. Verse 9 explains what he had done. He was slain for our sins, and he redeemed us to God. Therefore, the opening of this book must represent the beginning of a new age in which all men can obtain the remission of sins.

In 6:1-8:5, the seals are opened. The things revealed are the physical events that take place upon the earth during the entire Christian age. The seventh seal then describes the time of Judgment.

As explained in the introduction to chapter 6, a seal is used to designate the authority of the one who uses it. It also shows that the contents of this book cannot be changed. They have been placed there by God and sealed by him. In 6:1-8:5, the contents of this book will be revealed, but they can never be changed. The events contained in this book must definitely come to pass. This enables us to conclude that this book holds descriptions of major events that will take place on earth throughout the

Christian age and into the final Judgment.

Verse 1. And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.



God is holding this book in his right hand, showing that it is tremendously important. The right hand of God is always considered a place of importance. For example, when

Christ purged our sins, he ascended into heaven and sat down on the right hand of God (Heb. 1:3). Also, Mt. 25:34 explains that those who are to inherit heaven are on the right hand of God.

This book was probably in the form of a scroll, which was commonly used during that time. But regardless of the type of book, the important point is that it had writings on both sides. It was an extremely large book and filled with a great amount of information.

It was sealed with seven seals. Coffman points out that “especially important documents were sealed with multiple seals.”⁵ Since “7” is the complete sacred number, this indicates God had sealed the book, and it was completely under his control. He obviously had written the contents of this book giving it the highest possible importance. It must have contained God’s eternal plan for mankind.

Verse 2. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice. Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?

An angel begins to search for someone worthy or capable of opening the seals of this book. The search was extensive because no man in heaven, or in earth, or under the earth was found who could open the book (v. 3). Not even this angel, who possessed great strength, could open the seals of this book. The one who would be able to open this book would possess special qualities. The nature of this special quality is revealed in verse 9, which states that Christ was worthy because he was slain and had redeemed us to God. Christ is the only one who could and did make the ultimate sacrifice of shedding his blood to make atonement for our sins unto God. Because of this, he was worthy to open this great book and had received the power necessary to do so. Rom. 1:3 says that Christ had received power because of his resurrection from the dead.

Verse 3. And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.

No one in heaven, or earth, or under the earth was capable of opening this book. Not only could they not open it, they could not even look at it. This shows the vast difference between the power of man and of Christ who later opens the book. Man could not even look at it, but Christ took it and opened the seals.

Verse 4. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

The strong angel searched everywhere, but no one was found who could loose the seals of the book. No one was found who could even look upon the book. There was no man who even came close to being worthy to open the book. Because of this John wept.

The “weeping” by the apostle John probably indicated much more than mere disappointment about being unable to see the contents of the book. Since the opening of the book represented the beginning of a new era when men would have forgiveness of sin, it appeared to John that if no

one could open the book, there would be no redemption for man. This is why John wept. It appeared at this point in the vision that Satan would remain in control over man and everyone would be lost eternally.

The first four verses in this chapter picture time as it was before Christ died on the cross. The old law did not provide forgiveness for our sins. According to Heb. 9:15, people under the Law of Moses were redeemed from their sins when Christ died on the cross. Therefore, making the sacrifice of death to redeem man was a prerequisite of being able to open this book.

CHRIST PREVAILS TO OPEN THE BOOK

Verse 5. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

Verse 5 brings us to the time after Christ's resurrection. John is told to stop weeping because Christ has prevailed to loose the seals of the book, which means that he had made the necessary sacrifice. To "prevail" carries the same meaning as "overcoming." Rev. 3:21 says that Christ "overcame" and sat down with his Father in his throne. This is exactly the meaning of verse 5. The same Greek word is used in both references, and the ASV even uses the word "overcame" in this verse.

Christ is called the "Lion of the tribe of Juda." In Gen. 49:9-10, Judah was called a "lion's whelp." Christ is the lion that descended from Judah. Christ being described as a lion indicates his mighty strength and power. These characteristics made it possible for Christ to make the necessary sacrifice and become worthy to open the book that God held.

Christ, the one who had prevailed to open the book, was also described as being the root of David. This prophecy of Christ comes from Isa. 11:1 where he is described as being a "rod out of the stem of Jesse." There should be no doubt

that Christ is the one described here as prevailing to open the book.

The description of Christ as being a lion is in direct contrast to his description in verse 6 as being a lamb. We are all familiar with Christ's characteristics that cause him to be described as a lamb, but we should always remember that he is also a lion who possesses all power and authority in heaven and earth (Mt. 28:18).

Verse 6. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

The "lion" of verse 5 is also the "lamb" of verse 6 because both possess the ability to loose the seals of the book. Without a doubt, this is the Christ. He is standing in the midst of the throne. Heb. 1:3 states that after Christ had "purged our sins," he "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High." He purged our sins by shedding his blood on the cross. This is why he is pictured as a lamb that had been slain.

The lamb is described as having seven horns and seven eyes. We are told that these represent the seven Spirits of God. Coffman says that "horns were familiar symbols of honor, power, authority and glory in the biblical and other Hebrew literature."⁶ In keeping with the use of the number "7" as representing divine perfection and completeness, this would show that Christ possesses all divine power and authority. He is all-seeing and all-knowing because of the seven eyes.

The seven horns and seven eyes are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. Rev. 4:5 says that the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne are the seven Spirits of God. This is not a contradiction, neither are there two sets of seven Spirits of God. This is simply another description of the same "Spirits of God." Just as Christ is described as a "lion" and a "lamb," the seven Spirits of God are described as seven lamps before the throne and seven

horns and seven eyes. All of these symbols describe different characteristics of the same seven Spirits of God. Since the number “7” is used to show completeness, they must be a symbolic reference to the Holy Spirit.

Verse 7. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.

Christ was the one who had prevailed to take this book out of God’s hand. This shows that God gave Christ all power and authority. This took place at Christ’s resurrection. Rom 1:3 says that Christ was “declared to be the Son of God with power,... by the resurrection from the dead.” Also, Eph. 1:22 says that God put “all things” under Christ and also made him over “all things” to the church.

Verse 8. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

When Christ took the book out of God’s hand, immediately the living creatures and the elders fell down to worship him. These same heavenly beings were worshiping God in chapter 4. This shows that Christ has received total authority from God and is worthy of all our worship just as God is. It should be pointed out that this was the beginning of Christ’s reign. When Christ was resurrected from the dead, he began his reign, and according to 1 Cor. 15:25-26, he will continue to reign until all enemies are destroyed with the last enemy being death. Therefore, Christ is reigning today during this present Christian dispensation and will continue to reign until he delivers the kingdom to God at the end of time. (See 1Cor. 15:24; Heb. 10:12-13.) We should not look for a thousand-year period of time after this world comes to an end to reign with Christ because we are reigning with him today as kings and priests. (See 1:6; 5:10; 1Pet. 2:5-10.)

These twenty-four elders and four living creatures were worshiping God with harps and bowls full of odors and incense, which are interpreted for us as being the prayers of

saints. If the bowls of incense are symbolic of prayers, it follows that the harps must be symbolic also. The harps represent the ability of saints to worship God by singing. We know this to be true because in the next verse they begin to sing. In 14:2, the 144,000 are described as having voices as harpers harping with their harps. The next verse (14:3) says that these 144,000 are singing. This shows that God considers the voices of saints to be beautiful as they worship him in song.

Verse 9. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

They begin to sing a new song praising Christ for being worthy to open the seals of the book. He was worthy to do this because he had been slain. This is definitely a reference to Christ's crucifixion. When Christ died on the cross, he "redeemed us to God." He provided forgiveness of sins to all those who are willing to obey him.

They sang a "new" song. This song was new because this was the first time it could have been sung. Before Christ died on the cross, this song of redemption could not be sung. Those who lived under the law of Moses did not have forgiveness of sins until Christ died (Heb. 9:15). Because of this, they could not sing the song of redemption. When Christ died for our sins, this song of redemption could then be sung. It was a new song.

By the blood of Christ, people out of every kindred, tongue and nation were redeemed to God. This is the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham. Acts 3:25 states that promise "And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed." Gal. 3:16 defines this "seed" as Christ. He was a direct descendant from Abraham. When Christ died on the cross, all nations of the earth were blessed by the "seed" of Abraham. He redeemed all men to God who obey his commands. When we become members of his church, we have access to that redemption

through his blood. (See Acts 20:28.)

Verse 10. And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

We are kings and priests today, and we are presently reigning upon this earth in God's kingdom, the church. A king is one who reigns over a kingdom. The kingdom consists of those who are subject to the king. Christ is our king and is reigning on his throne in heaven at God's right hand today. We in the church are subjects in his kingdom and are reigning with him today. He has made us kings upon this earth. (See 20:4.) Under the law of Moses, the priests made atonement for the people's sins by offering sacrifices. Today, we are priests in the church. We have direct access to God's throne by prayer through Jesus, our high priest. (See Heb. 4:15,16.)

Notice that our reign is here on this earth. We are reigning on earth today in God's spiritual kingdom, the church just as Christ is reigning on his throne in heaven. Some would like to apply this verse to a future time of a thousand years, but we are already made a kingdom (past tense). Verse 9 identified the event that made it possible for us to become a kingdom and priests. It was Christ's death and resurrection. Obviously, that has already passed. Since that event made it possible for us to be a kingdom, the kingdom must exist today. (Comments made in 1:6 are also appropriate for this verse.)

Verse 11. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

Because Christ paid the price of redemption for man's sins, a tremendous host of heavenly beings began to worship him.

The numbers "10" and "1000" are used in Revelation to symbolize completeness and ultimate completeness. Therefore, the numbers "ten thousand times ten thousand" and "thousands of thousands" are used to mean the total,

complete heavenly host. Every being in heaven praised Jesus because he had redeemed man. This shows that we must worship Christ because of his sacrifice. It is very likely that this number also represents the vast number of Christians that will worship God during the Christian dispensation.

Verse 12. Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

Because Christ was slain, he was worthy to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and blessings. He gave the ultimate sacrifice for man's sins – his life. By doing this he completed God's plan to redeem man. Therefore, God gave him all things. Notice there are seven of these attributes. Since "7" is the number of divine completeness, we should not be surprised to find seven qualities in this list.

Verse 13. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

All created beings in heaven and earth are praising God and the Lamb. This shows that Christ has taken his place on the throne beside God and is worthy of our praise. Man must absolutely have no other gods before him. God created all things, and all things must honor him.

Verse 14. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

We have interpreted the four beasts as representing all physical things and the twenty-four elders as representing the spiritual lawgivers. This verse shows that our physical labors and our spiritual worship must be directed toward

God. We must strive to serve Jesus in everything we do.

¹Rubel Shelly, *The Lamb and His Enemies* (Nashville, Tenn.: 20th Century Christian Foundation, 1983), p.47.

²James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation publishing House, 1979), p 116. As quoted from Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1919) p. 505.

³Coffman, p. 116. As quoted from Watchman Nee, “*Come Lord Jesus*” (New York: Christian Fellowship publishers, 1976), p. 66

⁴Coffman, p. 116.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 121.