



Date: 3-22-2026

Sermon: When Heaven Changes Your Perspective

Text: Revelation 4 & 5

We need to be cautious when reading the images in revelation. We should approach this in a semi-literal way. The images are symbolic but also may be literal.

Our goal is not to decipher every symbol rather to understand the message that the author is communicating.

Revelation 4:1-11 NLT

Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and the same voice I had heard before spoke to me like a trumpet blast. The voice said, "Come up here, and I will

show you what must happen after this.” And instantly I was in the Spirit, and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it. The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow. Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And in front of the throne were seven torches with burning flames. This is the sevenfold Spirit of God. In front of the throne was a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal.

In the center and around the throne were four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back. The first of these living beings was like a lion; the second was like an ox; the third had a human face; and the fourth was like an eagle in flight. Each of these living beings had six wings, and their wings were covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day after day and night after night they keep on saying,

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—

the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come.”

Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever), the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say,

“You are worthy, O Lord our God,

to receive glory and honor and power.

For you created all things,

and they exist because you created what you pleased.”

Notes:

When _____ Calls

Revelation 5:1-14 NLT

Then 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. And I saw a strong angel, who shouted with a loud voice: "Who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and open it?" But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll and read it.

Then I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll and read it. 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 won the victory. He is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals."

Then I saw a Lamb that looked as if it had been slaughtered, but it 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 represent the sevenfold Spirit of God that is sent out into every part of the earth. He stepped forward and took the scroll from the right hand of the one sitting on the throne. And when he took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they

held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God's people. And they sang a new song with these words: "You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it. For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

And you have caused them to become a Kingdom of priests for our God. And they will reign on the earth." Then I looked again, and I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders. And they sang in a mighty chorus: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered— to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing."

And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They sang: "Blessing and honor and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever." And the four living beings said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped the Lamb.

Notes:

The Lamb is _____

Application:

1. It changes how you handle what you're facing right now
2. It changes what you prioritize in your life
3. It changes how you view Jesus

So, this week:

- Lay something down before Him
- A sin, a habit, a fear, a piece of control
- Something you've been holding onto

Because He is worthy of more than your belief.

He is worthy of your life.

The Four Views of Revelation:

Revelation 4:1-3

Historicist

John is given a vision intended to call attention to the sovereignty of God over history and the unique privilege of Christ to unfold the future. In the subsequent beginning of the breaking of the seven seals (chs. 6–8), and the events that this action calls forth, the vision gives a glimpse of the conquests of Imperial Rome for three hundred years, culminating in Constantine's establishment of Christianity as the religion of the empire. The seven trumpets that follow (chs. 8–11) foretell the fall of the Western, and then the Eastern Roman Empires, to the end of the world. Thus the seals and trumpets give the secular, political history from John's time forward. At 11:19, however, a new view commences, referring to the internal affairs of the church.

Preterist

We are introduced, most probably, to a heavenly courtroom scene. The Judge sits **on the throne** (v. 2) where, as we shall see in chapter 5, He is about to hand down sentence upon the accused. The plaintiffs are the martyrs of Christ, whose complaint against their persecutors is recorded later in the vision (6:9). The accused (Jerusalem) is about to be condemned. The repetition of the expression **after this** [Gr. *meta tauta*—literally, *after these things*] at the end of verse 1 identifies the present material as the previously announced “things that are about to happen after these things [again, *meta*

tauta]” (1:19, literally rendered). Since John was told (in the first century) that these things were “about to take place,” a first-century fulfillment is to be looked for. The seven-sealed book (5:1) is God’s sentence against Jerusalem, and the subsequent breaking of the first six seals depicts the Jewish crisis of a.d. 66–70: the war between the Jews and Rome, issuing in the utter destruction of the Jewish capital, state, and religious system.

Futurist

This passage marks one of the major turning points in the Book of Revelation. Everything in the previous chapters concerns “things which you have seen” and “the things which are” (1:19). We now come to **things which must take place after this** (v. 1). To the dispensational view, **after this**, or, more literally, “after these things” [*meta tauta*] means after “the things of the church,” or after the church age. Thus the material in Revelation after this point will be fulfilled after the church is gone.

Some believe that John’s transportation to heaven may be viewed as a type of the Rapture of the church, and the mention of **a voice ... like a trumpet** (v. 1) here may recall the language of the Rapture passages in 1 Corinthians 15:51–54 (which refers to “the last trumpet”) and 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 (which refers to the “voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God”). Dispensational *futurists* note that the church is not seen hereafter on the earth—only in heaven (7:9–17). As Walvoord puts it,

the word *church*, so prominent in chapters 2 and 3, does not occur again until 22:16, though the church is undoubtedly in view as the wife of the Lamb in Revelation 19:7.... Saints who come to know the Lord in this period are described as saved Israelites or saved Gentiles, never by terms which are characteristic of the church, the Body of Christ.

Futurists who reject the dispensational view do not place the Rapture of the church here, but they agree with the dispensationalists that the future Tribulation is the subject matter of the following chapters (4–19). In response to Walvoord’s points stated above, they would say that the word “church” is used in the Apocalypse only with reference to individual congregations, thus leaving unaddressed the question of the universal church and its whereabouts. “The church,” conceived as a global entity, is mentioned nowhere in Revelation—either before or after chapter 4. They further note that the terms *saints* (5:8; 8:3–4; 11:18; 13:7–10; 14:12; 15:3; 16:6; 17:6) and *redeemed* (5:9; 14:3–4) are indeed “terms which are characteristic of the church, the Body of Christ,” when found elsewhere throughout the New Testament.

Spiritual

To those who divide the book into seven segments, this verse is the beginning of section 2 or Act II. The opening words, **After these things** (v. 1), do not mean “This is

what will happen next,” but rather, “This is the vision I saw next.” The entire church age, depicted from an earthly standpoint in chapters 1 through 3, will now be viewed again—this time from a heavenly viewpoint. John is again said to be **in the Spirit** (v. 2). This probably means that he was not bodily removed from Patmos, but that he was given spiritual vision into the heavenly courts. His view of God’s **throne** (v. 2) reassured the persecuted churches that, despite their difficulties, God was still (and always is) in ultimate control of the situation. The emphasis on God’s sovereignty in Revelation is seen in the repeated mention of “throne” or “thrones” (forty times in this book; only fifteen times in the rest of the New Testament).

The Inhabitant of the throne is likened to **jasper** (v. 3), which is elsewhere said to be clear as crystal (21:11), and is otherwise unknown. Probably a diamond is intended, representing the purity of God on His throne. The **sardius** (or carnelian) stone is red, calling to mind God’s avenging wrath. The green of an **emerald** is here the principal color of the **rainbow**, a symbol of God’s mercy or grace (Gen. 9:12–15) [Morey].

Revelation 4:4-5

Historicist

Without attempting to identify the **twenty-four elders** (v. 4), Adam Clarke suggests that the image may be taken from the smaller Sanhedrin at Jerusalem, which was composed of 23 elders. Barnes speaks for many other expositors of this school when he recognizes in the 24 elders “the church triumphant—redeemed—saved—as rendering praise and honour to God; as uniting with the hosts of heaven in adoring him for his perfections and for the wonders of his grace.”

Ezekiel saw 25 men in a vision (Ezek. 8:16; 11:1), representing the high priest and the heads of the 24 orders of priests. Here, the Lamb replaces the high priest of that vision, and the church replaces the corrupt priesthood of Ezekiel’s day.

Clarke believes (see note at 1:4) that the seven spirits are angels, thinking it inappropriate that the Holy Spirit be designated as seven in number.

Matthew Henry, however, agrees with the majority in identifying the seven spirits with the Holy Spirit, but he explains the numerical problem by appealing to the “various gifts, graces and operations of the Spirit of God in the [seven] churches of Christ.”

Preterist

Jay Adams does not follow the apparent majority in seeing the **twenty-four elders** (v. 4) as representing the church (e.g., David Clark), or “the representative assembly of the

Royal Priesthood, the Church” (e.g., Chilton). He understands them to be distinguished from the church in 5:9f, where some manuscripts read “men,” “them,” and “they” in place of “us” and “we.” Nor does he follow others in seeing them as angels, since they are distinguished from angels throughout chapters 5 and 7. Instead, he follows Pieters in suggesting that:

the twenty-four elders probably do not represent any particular group.... They are included to complete the picture of the heavenly court.... They are here to create the proper effect. Later in the book, they help carry the story forward, much as the chorus in a Greek tragedy.... Beyond this, they seem to do nothing, and represent nothing.

The **lightnings, thunderings and voices** (v. 5) recall Mount Sinai, where God first established His covenant with Israel. Similar phenomena are mentioned here to suggest the end of that covenant and its replacement with another. The writer of Hebrews (citing Hag. 2) likened the overthrow of the first covenant (publicly demonstrated by the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in a.d. 70) to the time of its establishment at Sinai, but the latter would be accompanied by even more fearful phenomena (Heb. 12:18–29).

Futurist

Henry Morris appears alone in suggesting that the **twenty-four elders** (v. 4) are the first 24 ancestors of Christ (Adam through Pharez) listed in Genesis 5 and 11.

Ladd and Mounce both understand the elders to be angels, not human. Mounce describes them as “an exalted angelic order who serve and adore God as the heavenly counterpart to the twenty-four priestly and twenty-four Levitical orders (1 Chron. 24:4; 25:9–13) functioning both in the royal and the priestly.”

The majority opinion among dispensationalists (e.g., Gaebelin, Ryrie, Walvoord, Lindsey, and others) identifies the 24 elders as the New Testament saints, who were raptured into heaven (in v. 1). Gaebelin writes: “There is only one possible meaning. They represent the redeemed, the Saints in glory. They are Priests (clothed in white) and they are Kings (crowned); they are the royal priesthood before the throne.”

Their presence before the throne of God, prior to the unleashing of the various tribulation judgments, is seen as proof of a pretribulational Rapture. Hal Lindsey sees a further indicator that the church has been raptured at this point in the fact that the **seven lamps of fire** (v. 5), which were the seven churches on earth in chapter 1 (v. 20), are now **before the throne** in heaven. Ryrie and Walvoord do not follow Lindsey in this, rather tending to see the seven lamps and seven spirits as representing the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual

The **twenty-four elders** (v. 4) are the “celestial representatives” of all the redeemed, glorified and enthroned, who worship continuously. Their **white robes** symbolize their purity. Their **crowns** [Gr. *stephanos*] suggest “victory and joy, not political authority” (Morey). Leon Morris agrees, but specifies that they are *angelic* representatives of the whole body of the faithful. The number 24 recalls the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles (brought together in Rev. 21:12–14), and therefore suggest the redeemed of both the Old and the New Testament times. This view has the support of Hendriksen, Hailey, Hobbs, and Wilcock. The number 24 also recalls the priesthood, which was divided in David’s time into 24 courses for logistic reasons (1 Chron. 24). Since these elders do priestly functions—like burning incense (5:8)—they depict the church in its character as a “royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9). Wilson thinks they are angelic princes of the highest rank who perform priestly functions before the throne (compare 5:8 with 8:3–4).

Lightnings, thunders, and voices (v. 5) describe the fearsome power of God, and possibly His sovereignty over the forces of nature. The seven lamps, identified with the seven Spirits of God, represent the Holy Spirit.

Revelation 4:6-11

Historicist

In Ezekiel’s vision of the throne of God (Ezek. 1), creatures similar to these were seen under the throne, as if bearing it up. Albert Barnes points out that “it was not unusual for the thrones of monarchs to be supported by carved animals of various forms, which were designed undoubtedly to be somehow emblematic of government—either its stability, vigilance, boldness or firmness. Thus Solomon had twelve lions carved on each side of his throne.”

In the case of God’s throne, the creatures are not carved, but living creatures (v. 6). The rabbis said that the lion (v. 7) was chief of wild beasts, the ox (calf) the chief of domestic beasts, the eagle the chief of birds, and man the chief of all “intellectual creatures.”

Barnes thinks “they are symbolical beings designed to furnish some representation of the government of God—to illustrate, as it were, that on which the divine government rests, or which constitutes its support—to wit, power, intelligence, vigilance, energy.”

Clarke thinks the four creatures may represent the whole of creation. Matthew Henry thinks they signify the ministers of the gospel as the 24 elders signify the whole church. In that they cast their crowns before the throne (v. 10), they acknowledge His authority as the source of their own.

Preterist

David S. Clark sees the four living creatures (v. 6) as “angels, or archangels around the throne.” Chilton identifies them with Ezekiel’s cherubim (Ezek. 1 and 10). Adams, in apparent agreement, says the creatures, like the 24 elders, are neither angels nor men, since they ... are distinguished from both in chapters 5 and 7. They are rather to be identified with the Cherubim of Ezekiel, to which they most closely conform. Their function is to guard and bear the throne of God. In this passage, they serve the purpose of emphasizing the majesty of the vision. Like the elders, they are to help the revelation unfold.

Chilton compares the four faces with “the middle signs in the four quarters of the Zodiac,” namely, Leo (the lion), Taurus (the bull, or calf), Aquarius (the man), and Scorpio. He explains that a figure of an eagle was used for Scorpio in ancient times. As the heavens declare God’s glory, he says, so do these continually.

Futurist

The sea of glass (v. 6) is the heavenly model for the “molten sea” (laver) in Solomon’s temple (2 Chron. 4:2–6). According to Gaebelein, “Now it is solidified because no more water is needed for the cleansing of the Saints.”

Of the many interpretations of the four living creatures (v. 6), Walvoord prefers the idea that they represent “the attributes or qualities of God presented to John here as living entities.” This is also the opinion of Ironside. Ryrie gives this as one possible option also, since “they are said to be ‘in the midst of’ the throne.”

Ladd follows the rabbinic interpretation of the four faces on Ezekiel’s cherubim (see under *Historicist*, page 90), seeing the four creatures as four aspects of nature: wild beasts, domesticated animals, human beings, and flying creatures. He suggests two possible interpretations which he says may both be correct: (1) They represent the praise and adoration extended to the Creator by the totality of His creation; (2) they are angelic beings used by the Creator in executing His rule and divine will.

Henry Morris believes them to be angelic beings, an alternative Walvoord also admits as possible. Lindsey thinks they are angels “who represent the four portraits of Christ that we find in the four Gospels.” The idea that the lion, ox, man, and eagle portray, respectively, Christ as King (as in Matthew), Servant (as in Mark), Son of Man (as in Luke), and Son of God (as in John) goes back at least as far as Victorinus. Ryrie approves this view, although Walvoord seems to join Alford in condemning this notion as excessively speculative.

Gaebelein believes them to be the cherubim of the Old Testament, which, he says, were seen “always in connection with the throne and the presence of Jehovah.” He adds: “Their constant cry, ‘Holy, Holy,’ reminds us of the seraphim also” (i.e., of Isa. 6).

Spiritual

The four living creatures (v. 6) recall the description of the cherubim (Ezek. 1) and seraphim (Isa. 6) combined into one image. They may simply be unusual celestial beings who belong to neither class but bear similarities to both. Or they may be a symbolic picture of the creation, which praises God, as do the redeemed (v. 4). The description of the cherubim in Ezekiel portrays four creatures, each having four faces. Here four faces appear on four creatures also, but each of the creatures has only one face. The redeemed (the 24 elders) follow the lead of the creation (the living creatures) in glorifying God. Here God’s worthiness to be worshiped is connected to His having created all things (v. 11). Though cherub-like in appearance, the creatures’ song (v. 8) resembles that of the seraphim (Isa. 6).

Revelation 5:1-4

Historicist

This scroll may mean “the purposes and designs of God relative to His government of the world and of the Church” (Clarke). Matthew Henry is in agreement, seeing the contents of the book as “the designs and methods of divine Providence towards the church and the world.” Barnes identifies the contents of the book simply as “future events.” All three of these expositors see the vision as intended to show that no one other than Jesus can disclose the future dealings of God in history. John’s tears are an expression of disappointment. He had gotten his hopes high that he would see a disclosure of the future; with the failure to find any worthy parties in heaven, earth, or under the earth, it appeared those hopes were to be left unsatisfied.

Preterist

In Jay Adams’ view, the scroll with the seven seals is the sentence handed down by the judge against Jerusalem for its part in shedding “all the righteous blood” of the martyrs (Matt. 23:35). John has entered the courtroom at the end of the trial, just in time to hear the sentence delivered—if only one can be found worthy to execute it! Judgment is due, but only He who is without sin may “first cast a stone at her.” Initially, no one is found to qualify, resulting in great grief for John, since this would mean that the martyrs’ blood must go unavenged.

Adams and Pieters suggest that the seven seals are positioned in a row along the overlapping edge of the rolled-up scroll, requiring that all seven be broken before the scroll begins to be opened. On this view, the breaking of each seal does not produce action, but only gives occasion to introduce the leading characters in the ensuing drama. The actual judgments only begin with the sounding of the seven trumpets in chapter 8.

Alternatively, David S. Clark simply sees the scroll as containing “the future,” while David Chilton understands it to be a testament document representing the New Covenant. The big question, then, becomes: “Who is worthy to be the Mediator of this New Covenant?” Chilton writes: “But the coming of the New Covenant implies the passing away of the Old Covenant [Hebrews 8:13], and the judgment of apostate Israel.”

Futurist

Henry Morris, in agreement with many dispensational interpreters (e.g., Ironside, Criswell, Lindsey), wrote, “But what is this remarkable scroll? It is nothing less than the title deed to the earth itself.” Walvoord notes, “Roman law required a will to be sealed seven times as illustrated in the wills left by Augustus and Vespasian for their successors.” The mighty judgments of the Tribulation period that are unleashed by the opening of the document all are part of God’s reclaiming for Himself the control of the earth, which was forfeited to Satan by the fall of Adam and Eve long ago. The “redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph. 1:14) is accompanied by long-overdue punishments upon the usurpers who have “destroyed the earth” (Rev. 11:18) and defied their Creator. Ryrie writes:

Actually, we are not told in this chapter what the book contained, but when the seals are broken in chapter 6 the judgments of God are poured out on the earth. When the seventh seal is opened, the trumpets sound (8:1) and when the seventh trumpet blows, Christ is said to receive the kingdoms of this world (11:15).

Under Jewish law, real estate that had been forfeited by a man could be redeemed (bought back) by any near kinsman (Lev. 25:25). To redeem the earth, forfeited by man, the redeemer must be a kinsman (hence a man, not an angel) and must come forward with the purchase price in hand—something that no one in the universe could do except Jesus (see 1 Pet. 1:18–19).

Spiritual

The scroll is the “redemptive plan of God” seen as “God’s Last Will and Testament” (Morey). It is in the right hand, a symbol of God’s power and authority. Since it is written inside and out, all available space has been filled, so nothing can be added to God’s plan. It must be a *strong* angel with a loud voice who issues the summons, so that every

person in heaven, earth, and under the earth may hear of the challenge. The question is not whether anyone *strong enough* to break the seals can be found, but whether any will be *worthy* to do so. John weeps because there seems to be none worthy to step forward, and God's purposes must therefore be delayed or hindered. No man but Christ is worthy to execute the plan of God, symbolized by breaking the seals and opening the scroll.

Revelation 5:5-6

Historicist

Matthew Henry and Adam Clarke both see in the double designation of Christ a reference to His dual nature. According to the flesh, He is **of the tribe of Judah** (v. 5), but as touching His divine nature, He is **the Root of David**. Some (e.g., Barnes) interpret the latter expression as essentially synonymous with the Old Testament phrase, "a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch ... out of his roots" (Isa. 11:1), later referred to as "a Root of Jesse" (Isa. 11:10).

Henry and Clarke, however, with many others, see the title **Root of David** as describing, not Christ's ancestry, but David's. That is, Christ is not only David's "Son," but also David's "source" or "Root" (cf. Christ's enigmatic question in Matt. 22:45).

Expositors agree in seeing the **seven horns** (v. 6) and the **seven eyes** as representing "all power" and "all knowledge and wisdom," respectively. They do not agree on the identification of the "seven spirits of God." Henry, and most others, seeing them as the Holy Spirit, and Clarke as angels of providence.

Preterist

The absence of a qualified person to loose the seals and open the scroll has provided the dramatic setting for the introduction of the Hero of Revelation, usually depicted in this book as the **Lamb** (v. 6). Comparing Christ with a lamb is not a reference to His gentleness, since He is portrayed in the following chapters as anything but gentle (cf. 6:16)! His role as the Sacrificed One explains His being likened to a lamb (cf. John 1:29). The fact of His having been slain is emphasized (v. 6) because Christ, having sacrificed Him-self, **prevailed** (v. 5) over the forces of evil (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14). As the One slain by the leaders in Jerusalem, He shares the same grievance against her as do the other plaintiffs (e.g., 6f), namely that, as a victim of her injustice, He has the right to be vindicated against Jerusalem (Luke 11:50f). He who was like a lamb in His sacrifice has become like a **Lion** (v. 5) in avenging the righteous blood that was shed.

Futurist

Henry Morris, who seems to be alone in identifying the 24 elders as the patriarchs from Adam through Pharez (see note at 4:4f), is probably also unique in suggesting that the elder who spoke to John was Judah himself. Judah is called a lion in Genesis 49:9. The oft-repeated expression, **Behold!** (v. 5), is similar in meaning to our exclamation, “Surprise!” John had wept at the prospect of no one qualifying to open the scroll. The unexpected news that a lion-like Judean had qualified for the task changed his chagrin into hope. But this announcement was not the end of the surprises. John writes, “I looked—and surprise!” It was no lion at all, but **a Lamb** (v. 6) that had stepped forward. From the viewpoint of those in heaven, He is recognized as a conquering Lion, though to human eyes, Jesus seemed a mere lamb.

Ryrie thinks that the **seven eyes** (v. 6) “represent the fullness of the Spirit of God.” Of the same, Walvoord writes, “This may be a reference to seven angels.” Morris sees in the **seven horns** (v. 6) a reminder of the invasion of Jericho, when seven “trumpets of ram’s horns” were sounded. These ideas are intriguing when one considers that seven angels with seven trumpets become a focal point of the action after the seventh seal is broken in chapter 8.

Gaebelein suggests that the reference to Christ as the Lion of **Judah** (v. 5) and the Root of **David** underscores the fact “that Judah and the house of David will be remembered in mercy when the judgment sweeps over the earth.”

Spiritual

That Jesus is here connected to Judah’s tribe, and particularly David’s line, is a way of underscoring His messianic qualifications, since the prophets foretold that the messiah would come through that pedigree. The designation **Lamb** (v. 6) for Christ is found 28 times in Revelation. John the Baptist declared that Christ was like a sacrificial lamb (John 1:29). In this portrayal, the image of a lamb is not strictly adhered to, since the figure has **seven eyes**, an emblem of omniscience, and **seven horns**, suggesting omnipotence. These two traits qualify Christ to be the ideal judge, prosecutor, and executioner, even as His having **been slain** and His lamb-like innocence qualify Him to be the ideal Savior. Remember that this is a symbolical drama, so we should not expect Him to have this peculiar appearance in reality, nor is it uniformly used as a way of describing of Him throughout the remainder of the book (e.g., 6:2; 14:14; 19:11ff).

Revelation 5:7-10

Historicist

Adam Clarke writes that “the whole Church of God ... acknowledge[s] that Jesus Christ is alone worthy and able to unfold and execute all the mysteries and counsels of God.” The celebration of redemption is linked with the celebration of exaltation of those redeemed: “We shall reign on the earth.” Of this, Matthew Henry points out that:

every ransomed slave is not immediately preferred to honour; he thinks it is a great favor to be restored to liberty. But when the elect of God were made slaves by sin and Satan, in every nation of the world, Christ not only purchased their liberty for them, but the highest honour and preferment, *made them kings and priests ... and they shall reign on the earth.*

This **reign on earth** (v. 10) is taken either in the postmillennial sense to mean an ascendancy of Christianity in this world—the kings and governors being all Christians—prior to the Second Coming (Adam Clarke, Albert Barnes), or in the amillennial sense of a spiritual reign of the saints over their own spirits (no longer as slaves of sin) in the spiritual kingdom at the present time—the apparent view of Matthew Henry, along with many others.

Preterist

The taking of the scroll by the Lamb provokes an outburst of worship and praise in heaven, and a **new song** (v. 9) is introduced. In Revelation 4:11, they had sung an “old song” of praise to God for His older work of creating all things. The new song praises Him for His new work of redemption in Christ. This worship is accompanied by the priestly worship form of the offering up of **incense** (v. 8), which here represents **the prayers of the saints**—most likely the Christians who are being persecuted and are pleading for deliverance (cf. 6:10). This deliverance comes when their persecutors in Jerusalem are judged, after the seven seals of the scroll are broken. Making the redeemed **kings and priests** (v. 10), or, as some manuscripts have it, “a kingdom of priests,” implies that the original kingdom of priests, Israel (Ex. 19:5–6), has been done away with and replaced by the Church (cf. Heb. 7:12; 8:13).

Futurist

The appearance of the Lamb to open the scroll marks the beginning of the end of the present age. With the breaking of each seal, His Second Coming is brought another step nearer. The mention **of the prayers of the saints** (v. 8) reminds us that for almost 2,000 years the church has been praying, in accordance with Christ’s instructions, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The breaking of the seals paves the way for the fulfillment of this age-long desire of the saints to see the kingdom of God established.

The reign of the saints **on the earth** (v. 10)—as opposed to “in heaven”—is a reference to the millennial reign of the saints with Christ after He has returned to earth to establish

His kingdom. Henry Morris writes: “Three times in the book of Revelation it is said that believers are to be made kings and priests (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). These functions apply particularly in the millennial kingdom, when there is still need for them.” According to dispensational expectations, many unsaved people will live on earth during the Millennium, and the saints will reign over these people from their headquarters in Jerusalem (cf. Luke 19:17).

Spiritual

This is the fulfillment of Daniel 7:9–14, where the One like the Son of Man approaches the Ancient of Days to receive dominion and a kingdom. Incense represents **the prayers of the saints** (v. 8; cf. Ps. 141:2), which saints are represented by the 24 elders offering them in this vision. The **new song** (v. 9) is the response of the redeemed to God’s new redemptive acts in Christ in establishing the New Covenant, even as the older song of Moses (Exodus 15) was the response of the redeemed to God’s older acts of redemption, associated with the Exodus and the establishment of the Old Covenant. This new song is the song of the church throughout the present age. In contrast to the song sung in 4:11, which praised God’s work in creation, this song focuses on God’s work of redeeming men from every nation through Christ. The royal priesthood of saints now spiritually **reign on the earth** (v. 10) through “their worship, their prayers and their witness in word and deed” (Morey).

Revelation 5:11-14

Historicist

Clarke rightly observes that Christ receives the same praise as does God, which would be idolatry if He were not God Himself. On these verses, Henry writes:

Indeed, it is just matter of joy to all the world to see that God does not deal with men in a way of absolute power and strict justice, but in a way of grace and mercy through the Redeemer.... All the world has reason to rejoice in this. The song of praise ... consists of three parts, one part sung by the church, another by the church and the angels, the third by every creature.

Barnes notes that:

the whole universe, therefore, is sublimely represented as in a state of profound adoration, waiting for the developments to follow on the opening of the mysterious volume. All feel an interest in it; all feel that the secret is with God; all feel that there is but One who can open this volume; and all gather around, in the most reverential posture, awaiting the disclosure of the great mystery.

Preterist

The song of 4:11 was sung by the 24 elders alone. In the song of 5:9–10, they were joined by the four living creatures. Now **many angels** (v. 11), numbering into millions, add their voices in attributing glory to the Lamb. This is the second song sung to the Lamb in this chapter. In the first (v. 9), He was declared to be “worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals.” In the second (v. 12), He is proclaimed worthy to receive His due, described in the form of a sevenfold doxology. He is thus “doubly worthy”—first, to unleash judgments on His persecutors (i. e., by breaking the seals), and second, to get for Himself His rightful glory. Finally, every created being in the universe joins in this rising crescendo of praise and worship to both **Him who sits on the throne and the Lamb** (v. 13). When the praises have reached their highest point, **the four living creatures** add their **Amen!** (v. 14), and the **elders** fall on their faces. After all of this dramatic praise, it would seem difficult for the following chapters to avoid being anticlimactic—but they manage to overcome this difficulty!

Futurist

The “myriads of myriads and chiliads of chiliads” of **angels** (v. 11, literally), who now join the song are not a literal number, but a way of saying “innumerable” angels. God’s faithful angels (in contrast to those that fell) are countless. This language recalls that of Daniel 7:10—“A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.” Compare also Psalm 68:17—“The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands.”

Those things attributed to Christ by the singing multitude speak not of His First Coming, which was in weakness and humiliation, but of His Second Coming, which is in **power ... and strength and honor and glory** (v. 12).

When we are told that **every creature** (v. 13) in heaven, earth, and the sea now sing of the glory of God, this “must refer,” writes Morris, “either to holy angels appointed to serve in these regions, or else to the animal creation—more likely the latter.” That the creation glorifies God is declared in Psalm 19 and again in Psalm 148:7–10: “Praise the Lord from the earth, You great sea creatures, ... beasts and all cattle; creeping things and flying fowl.” Morris qualifies this statement, as seems necessary, “with the implied exception, no doubt, of those evil ones from whom the world is to be redeemed.”

Spiritual

One example of why taking a literal approach to Revelation is problematic can be seen here, where every created thing in the universe is said to be singing God’s praises. **Every creature** (v. 13) would have to include humans, yet many of them are still cursing and blaspheming throughout the judgments that follow. The vision succeeds in obtaining its desired effect, however, for one can hardly help but be thrilled when reading this

description and picturing the scene as John experienced it. What a contrast to his circumstances on Patmos, to which he must have become oblivious by this time!¹

¹ Steve Gregg, [*Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary*](#) (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), 100–101.