



Route 66, Revelation

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Revelation 5:1

"And in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne I saw a roll written on the front and on the back, and seated with seven seals."

The vision of Ezekiel: *"And, when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me; and lo, a written scroll was in it; and he spread it before me; and it had writing on the front and on the back; and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe."* (Ezekiel 2:9-10)

We must note that it was a scroll and not a book which was in the hand of God. In the ancient world, down to the second century A.D., the form of literary work was the scroll, not the book.

The scroll was made of papyrus, manufactured in single sheets about ten inches by eight. The sheets were joined together horizontally when a great deal of writing had to be done. The writing was in narrow columns about three inches long, with margins of about two and a half inches at the top and at the bottom, and with about three-quarters of an inch between the columns.

The scroll commonly had a wooden roller at each end. It was held in the left hand, unrolled with the right, and, as the reading went on, the part in the left hand was rolled up again.

The dimensions of a scroll from the following statistics. Second and Third John, Jude and Philemon would occupy one sheet of papyrus; Romans would require a roll 11 1/2 feet long; Mark, 19 feet; John, 23 1/2 feet; Matthew, 30 feet; Luke and Acts, 32 feet.

The Revelation itself would occupy a roll 15 feet long. It was such a roll that was in the hand of God. Two things are said about it.

(i) It was written on the front and on the back. Papyrus was a substance made from the pith of a bulrush which grew in the delta of the Nile. The bulrush was about fifteen feet high, with six feet of it below the water; and it was as thick as a man's wrist. The pith was extracted and cut into thin strips with a very sharp knife. A row of strips was laid vertically; on the top of them another row of strips was laid horizontally; the whole was then moistened with Nile water and glue and pressed together. The resulting substance was beaten with a mallet and then smoothed with pumice stone; and there emerged a substance not unlike brown paper.

From this description it will be seen that on one side the grain of the papyrus would run horizontally; that side was known as the recto; and on that side the writing was done, as it was easier to write where the lines of the writing ran with the lines of the fibers. The side on which the fibers ran vertically was called the verso and was not so commonly used for writing.

Papyrus was an expensive substance. So, if a person had a great deal to write, he wrote both on the front and on the back. A sheet written on the back, the verso, was called an opisthograph, that is, a sheet written behind.

Juvenal talks of a young tragedian walking about with the papyrus manuscript of a tragedy on Orestes written on both sides; it was a lengthy production! The roll in God's hand was written on both sides; there was so much on it that recto and verso alike were taken up with the writing.

(ii) It was sealed with seven seals.

(a) When a roll was finished, it was fastened with threads and the threads were sealed at the knots. The one ordinary document sealed with seven seals was a will. Under Roman law the seven witnesses to a will sealed it with their seals, and it could only be opened when all seven, or their legal representatives, were present. The roll may be what we might describe as God's will, his final settlement of the affairs of the universe.

(b) It is more likely that the seven seals stand simply for profound secrecy. The contents of the roll are so secret that it is sealed with seven seals. The tomb of Jesus was sealed to keep it safe (Matthew 27:66)

Revelation 5:2-4

"And I saw a strong angel proclaiming in a great voice:

"Who is good enough to open the roll, and to loosen its seals?" And there was no one in heaven, or on earth, or under the earth, who was able to open the roll or to look at it; and I was weeping sorely because there was no one who was found to be good enough to open the roll or to see it.'"

(i) In Revelation 4:1 the angels voice had made the promise to him:

"I will show you what must take place after this."

(seven churches).

(ii) *"Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secrets to his servants the prophets"* (Amos 3:7). But here was a world so far from God that there was none able to receive his message.

For John that problem was to be triumphantly solved in the emergence of the Lamb. But behind this problem lies a great and a challenging truth. God cannot deliver a message to men unless there be a man fit to receive it. Here is the very essence of the problem of communication. It is the problem of the teacher; he cannot teach truth which his scholars are unable to receive. It is the problem of the preacher; he cannot deliver a message to a congregation totally incapable of comprehending it.

It is the eternal problem of love; love cannot tell its truths or give its gifts to those incapable of hearing and receiving. The need of the world is for men and women who will keep themselves sensitive to God. He has a message for the world in every generation; but that message cannot be delivered until there is found a man capable of receiving it.

THE LION OF JUDAH AND THE ROOT OF DAVID

Revelation 5:5

"And one of the elders said to me: "Stop weeping. Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has won such a victory that he is able to open the book and its seven seals."

John was weeping and yet his tears were unnecessary. Human grief often springs from insufficient knowledge. If we had patience to wait and trust, we would see that God has his own solutions for the situations which bring us tears.

Jesus Christ has won such a victory that he is able to open the book and to loosen the seals.

i) Because of his victory over death and all the powers of evil.

ii) Because of his complete obedience to God he is able to know God's secrets and He is able to reveal God's secrets. iii) And it is his privilege and duty to control the things which shall be. Because of what Jesus did, he is the Lord of truth and of history. He is called by two great titles.

(i) He is the Lion of Judah.

(ii) He is the Root of David. This title goes back to Isaiah's prophecy that there will come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a root of Jesse who shall be an ensign to the people (Isaiah 11:1,10). Jesse was the father of David, and this means that Jesus Christ was the Son of David, the promised Messiah.

So, here we have two great titles which are particularly Jewish. They have their origin in the pictures of the coming Messiah; and they lay it down that Jesus Christ triumphantly performed the work of the Messiah and is, therefore, able to know and to reveal the secrets of God, and to preside over the working out of his purposes in the events of history.

THE LAMB

Revelation 5:6

And I saw a Lamb standing in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders. It still bore the marks of having been slain. It had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God dispatched to all the earth.”

The word he uses for Lamb is not used of Jesus Christ anywhere else in the New Testament.

John the Baptist pointed to him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29,36).

Peter speaks of the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:19).

Isaiah 53:7, in the chapter so dear to Jesus and to the early Church, we read of the lamb brought to the slaughter. But in all these cases the word is *amnos* whereas the word that the Revelation uses is *arnion*. This is the word that Jeremiah uses, when he says: "I was like a gentle lamb that is led to the slaughter" (Jeremiah 11:19).

Background: Exodus 12:1-7 *"The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb[for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs.""*

(i) The Lamb still bears the marks of having been slain.

The picture of the sacrifice of Christ, still visible in the heavenly places. Even in the heavenly places Jesus Christ is the one who loved us and gave himself for us.

(ii) This same Lamb, with the marks of sacrifice still on it, is the Lamb with the seven horns and the seven eyes.

(a) The seven horns stand for omnipotence. In the Old Testament the horn stands for two things.

First, it stands for sheer power.

In the blessing of Moses the horns of Joseph are like the horns of a wild ox and with them he will push the people together to the ends of the earth (Deuteronomy 33:17).

Zechariah sees the vision of the four horns which stand for the nations who have scattered Israel (Zechariah 1:18).

Second, it stands for honor. It is the confidence of the Psalmist that in the favor of God our horn shall be exalted (Psalm 89:17).

The good man's horn shall be exalted with honor (Psalm 112:9).

God exalts the horn of his people (Psalm 148:14).

We must add still another strand to this picture. In the time between the Testaments the great heroes of Israel were the Maccabees; they were the great warriors who were the liberators of the nations; and they are represented as horned lambs (I Enoch 90:9).

Here is the great paradox; the Lamb bears the sacrificial wounds upon it; but at the same time it is clothed with the very might of God which can now shatter its enemies. The Lamb has seven horns; the number seven stands for perfection; the power of the Lamb is perfect, beyond withstanding.

(b) The Lamb has seven eyes and the eyes are the Spirits which are dispatched into all the earth. The picture comes from Zechariah. There the prophet sees the seven lamps which are "the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth" (Zechariah 4:10). It is an eerie picture; but quite clearly it stands for the omniscience of God. In an almost crude way it says that there is no place on earth which is not under the eye of God.

Here is a tremendous picture of Christ. He is the fulfillment of all the hopes and dreams of Israel, for he is the Lion of Judah and the Root of David. He is the one whose sacrifice availed for men, and who still bears the marks of it in the heavenly places. But the tragedy has turned to triumph and the shame to glory; and he is the one whose all-conquering might none can withstand and whose all-seeing eye none can escape.

Revelation 5:7-14

"And the Lamb came and received the roll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. When it had received the roll, the four living creatures fell before the Lamb and so did the twenty-four elders, each of whom had a harp and golden bowls laden with incense, which are the prayers of God's dedicated people. And they sang a new song and this is what they sang:

Worthy are you to receive the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and so at the price of your life blood you bought for God those of every tribe and tongue and people and race and made them a kingdom of priests to our God. And they will reign upon the earth.

And I saw, and I heard the voice of many angels, who were in a circle round the throne, and the living creatures, and the elders; and their number was ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands, and they were singing with a great voice:

The Lamb which has been slain is worthy to receive the power and the riches and the wisdom and the strength and the honor and the glory and the blessing.

And I heard every created creature which was in the heaven and upon the earth and beneath the earth and on the sea and all things in them saying:

Blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever to him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb. And the four living creatures said, Amen; and the elders fell down and worshipped."

First, there is the praise of the four living creatures and of the twenty-four elders. Here we see all nature and all the Church combining to praise the Lamb.

Second, there is the praise of the thousands of angels. Here is the picture of all the inhabitants of heaven lifting up their voices in praise.

Third, John sees every created creature, in every part of the universe, to its deepest depth and its farthest corner, singing in praise.

Here is the truth that heaven and earth and all that is within them is designed for the praise of Jesus Christ; and it is our privilege to lend our voices and our lives to this vast chorus of praise, for that chorus is necessarily incomplete so long as there is one voice missing from it.

Rev. 5:8 Prayers of the Saints

The first section in the chorus of praise is the song of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders; and, as we have seen, they represent all that is in nature and in the universal Church.

The picture of the elders is interesting. They have harps. The harp was the traditional instrument to which the Psalms were sung. *"Praise the Lord with harp,"* says the Psalmist (Psalm 33:2). *"Sing praises to the Lord with the harp; the harp, and the sound of melody"* (Psalm 98:5).

"Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God upon the harp" (Psalm 147:7).

The harp stands for the music of praise as the Jews knew it.

The elders also have golden bowls full of incense; and the incense is the prayers of God's dedicated people. The likening of prayers to incense comes also from the Psalms.

"Let my prayer be before thee counted as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice" (Psalm 141:2).

Revelation 5:9 A new song

"The song that the four living creatures and the elders sang was a new song."

"Sing to him a new song," (Psalm 33:3).

"Out of the fearful pit and from the miry clay and set his foot on a rock and put a new song in his mouth to praise God" (Psalm 40:3).

"O sing a new song to the Lord, for he has done marvelous things" (Psalm 98:1)

"I will sing a new song to thee, O God" (Psalm 96)

"Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the faithful" (Psalm 144:9)

Psalm 149:1 The nearest parallel in the Old Testament comes from Isaiah.

There God declares new things and the prophet calls upon men to sing to the Lord a new song

There is the new name (Revelation 2:17; Revelation 3:12);

There is the new Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12; Revelation 21:2);
There is the new song (Revelation 5:9; Revelation 14:3);
The new heavens and the new earth (Revelation 21:1)
God makes all things new (Revelation 21:5).

Greek has two words for new, *neos* which means new in point of time, and *kainos* which means new in point of quality. *Kainos* describes a thing that has never existed before.

The significance of this is that Jesus Christ brings into life a quality which has never existed before, new joy, new thrill, new strength, new peace.

Revelation 5:9-10

*“Worthy are you to receive the scroll, and to open its seals, because you were slain, and so at the price of your life blood you bought for God those of every tribe and tongue and people and race, and made them a kingdom of priests to our God, and they will reign upon the earth.
The praise rendered to the Lamb by the four living creatures and the elders is rendered because he died. In this song there is summed up the results of the death of Jesus Christ.”*

(i) It was a sacrificial death. That is to say, it was a death with purpose in it. It was not an accident of history; it was not even the tragic death of a good and heroic man in the cause of righteousness and of God; it was a sacrificial death. The object of sacrifice is to restore the lost relationship between God and man; and it was for that purpose, and with that result, that Jesus Christ died.

(ii) The death of Jesus Christ was an emancipating death. From beginning to end the New Testament is full of the idea of the liberation of mankind achieved by him.

He gave his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

He gave himself a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:6).

He redeemed us--literally bought us out from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13).

We are redeemed not by any human wealth but by the precious blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:19).

(2 Peter 2:1). We are bought with a price

(1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Corinthians 7:23). The New Testament consistently declares that it cost the death of Jesus Christ to rescue man from the dilemma and the slavery into which sin had brought him. The New Testament has no "official" theory of how that effect was achieved; but of the effect itself it is in no doubt whatever.

(iii) The death of Jesus Christ was universal in its benefits. It was for men and women of every race.

(iv) He did not die for nothing.

(a) He made us kings. He opened to men the royalty of sonship of God. Men have always been sons of God by creation; but now there is a new sonship of grace open to every man.

(b) He made us priests. In the ancient world the priest alone had the right of approach to God. When an ordinary Jew entered the Temple, he could make his way through the Court of the Gentiles, through the Court of the Women, into the Court of the Israelites; but into the Court of the Priests he could not go. It was thus far and no

farther. But Jesus Christ opened the way for all men to God. Every man becomes a priest in the sense that he has the right of access to God.

(c) He gave us triumph. His people shall reign upon the earth. This is not political triumph or material lordship. It is the secret of victorious living under any circumstances.

"In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer,

I have overcome the world" (Jn.16:33). In Christ there is victory over self, victory over circumstance and victory over sin.

When we think of what the death and life of Jesus Christ have done for men, it is no wonder that the living creatures and the elders burst into praise of him.

Revelation 5:11-12 Angels Song

"And I saw, and I heard the voice of many angels, who were in a circle round the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and their number was ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands; and they were saying with a great voice:

The Lamb, which has been slain, is worthy to receive the power and the riches and the wisdom and the strength and the honor and the glory and the blessing."

The chorus of praise is taken up by the unnumbered hosts of the angels of heaven. They stand in a great outer circle round the throne and the living creatures and the elders and they begin their song.

"Blessed art thou, O Lord, the God of Israel, our Father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come from thee, and thou rulest over all. In thy hand are power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great, and to give strength to all"

(1 Chronicles 29:10-12).

The song of the living creatures and of the elders told of the work of Christ in his death; now the angels sing of the possessions of Christ in his glory. Seven great possessions belong to the Risen Lord.

(i) To him belongs the power He is not one who can plan but never achieve; to him belongs the power. We can say triumphantly of him: "He is able."

(ii) To him belongs the riches.

Paul speaks of "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8).

There is no promise that Jesus Christ has made that he does not possess the resources to carry out. There is no claim on him which he cannot satisfy.

(iii) To him belongs the wisdom He has the wisdom to know the secrets of God and the solution of the problems of life.

(iv) To him belongs the strength. There is no situation with which he cannot cope.

(v) To him belongs the honor A strange thing is that even those who are not Christian often honor Christ by admitting that in his teaching alone lies the hope of this distracted world.

(vi) To him belongs the glory. Glory is that which by right belongs to God alone. To say that Jesus Christ possesses the glory is to say that he is divine.

(vii) To him belongs the blessing. Here is the inevitable climax of it all. All these things Jesus Christ possesses, and every one of them he uses in the service of the men for whom he lived and died; he does not clutch them to himself.

Therefore, there rises to him from all the redeemed thanksgiving for all that he has done. And that thanksgiving is the one gift that we who have nothing can give to him who possesses all.

THE SONG OF ALL CREATION

Revelation 5:13-14

"And I heard every created creature which was in the heaven, and upon the earth, and beneath the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, saying:

Blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever to him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb. And the four living creatures said, Amen; and the elders fell down and worshipped."

It has been suggested that the reference is to the birds of the air; the very singing of the birds is a song of praise. It has been suggested that the reference is to the sun, the moon and the stars; the heavenly bodies in their shining are praising God. It has been suggested that the phrase gathers up every possible being in heaven--the living creatures, the elders, the myriads of angels and every other heavenly being.

The creatures which are beneath the earth add their praise. That can only mean the dead who are in Hades, and here is something totally new. In the Old Testament the idea is that the dead are separated altogether from God and man and live a shadowy existence. "In death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who can give thee praise?" (Psalms 6:5).

"Shall the dust praise thee? Shall it declare thy truth? What profit is there in my death if I go down to the pit?" (Psalms 30:9). "Dost thou work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise up to praise thee? Is thy steadfast love declared in the grave, or thy faithfulness in Abaddon? Are thy wonders known in the darkness, or thy saving help in the land of forgetfulness?" (Psalms 88:10-12). "For Sheol cannot thank thee, death cannot praise thee; those that go down to the pit cannot hope for thy faithfulness" (Isaiah 38:18).

Here is a vision which sweeps all this away. Not even the land of the dead is beyond the reign of the Risen Christ. Even from beyond death the chorus of praise rises to him.

The picture here is all-inclusive of all nature praising God. There are in Scripture many magnificent pictures of the praise of God by nature. In the Old Testament itself there is Psalm 148.

But the noblest song of praise comes from the Apocrypha. In the Greek Old Testament there is an addition to Daniel. It is called The Song of the Three Children and it is sung by Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego before they enter the fiery furnace. It is long, but it is one of the world's great poems, and we must quote in full the part in which they call upon nature to praise God.

O ye sun and moon, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye stars of heaven, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O every shower and dew, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O all ye winds, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye fire and heat, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye winter and summer, bless the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye dews and storms of snow, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.

O ye nights and days, bless the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye light and darkness, bless the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye cold and heat, bless the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye ice and cold, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye frost and snow, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye lightnings and clouds, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O let the earth bless the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye mountains and little hills, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O all ye herbs of the field, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O all things that grow on the earth, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye fountains, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye seas and rivers, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye whales and all that move in the waters, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O all ye fowls of the air, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O all ye beasts and cattle, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O all ye creeping things of the earth, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye children of men, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.