

# Lesson 14

In Chapter 4, God draws aside the curtain of heaven and gives John a vision of the majestic throne of God. Chapter 4 is focused on God the Father. Chapter 5, as we will soon see, is focused on God the Son. These two chapters together provide the basis for all that follows in this book. The judgments we are about to see all come from the throne of God.

## **Revelation 4:9-11**

**9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, 10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.**

When the four living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to God, the twenty-four elders fall down before God and worship him, casting their crowns before the throne. This act of casting their crowns shows that their authority is a delegated authority. They owe their existence and their present status completely to God's power and to God's will. Yes, they reign, but (unlike the Roman emperors) these twenty-four elders do not claim to reign apart from God. Instead, they recognize that their reign comes from God, who is the true king over all.

We know that Christians have a **special delegated reign** from Christ — Romans 5:17 and 1 Peter 2:9. But is there a sense in which **all men** have a delegated reign from God. **Yes.** And we see that all the way back in Genesis 1.

**Genesis 1:26** — *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: **and let them have dominion** [literally, **let them rule**] over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.*

In fact, the context there suggests that man's ability to rule is one way in which man shares the image of God. And all men have a responsibility to rule according to the will of God because their right to rule is God-given. All rule by men is a delegated rule from God. The Roman emperors did not believe that — but they would soon learn otherwise.

Twice we see the phrase “who liveth for ever and ever.” That description of God emphasizes God's eternal nature, which stands in stark contrast to the supposed Roman deities who had been created and who had an appointment with death. It reminds me of Psalm 22:29 — “All they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul.” The Roman emperors believed they were all powerful — but they could not keep themselves from dying.

The Greek word translated “worship” in verse 10 means to prostrate oneself before deity and to kiss the feet or hem of the garment. Verse 10 tells us that the elders **fell down** before God and worshipped him.

To a first century reader, verse 11 brings the central theme of this book front and center — **Caesar or Christ?** The throne of Caesar or the throne of God? Why? Because a Roman emperor believed that he was Lord and that he was worthy of glory, honor, and power. In fact, the phrases “worthy art thou” and “our Lord and God” were also used in the worship of the Roman emperor. The emperor Domitian took “Lord and God” as his official title and required all government announcements and proclamations to begin with the phrase “Our Lord and God Domitian commands.”

Verse 11 leaves no doubt as to who alone is worthy of our worship — and it is **not** Caesar! In fact, verse 11 explains why that is true — it is true because God is the **creator** of all things, and all things were created for God's pleasure. No Roman emperor could ever make that claim! The Roman emperors were creatures, not creators.

The beautiful scene in this chapter is one of **unending worship** of God by the cherubim and by the church. Chapter 4 shows all creation worshipping the Creator.

This point is made so frequently in the book of Revelation that we should likely add it to our list of themes — **nothing created is worthy of our worship**. Only the Creator is worthy of worship, or, as John will later be told, “**Worship God!**” (Revelation 22:9).

By contrast, Romans 1:25 depicts sinful men worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator — and (not surprisingly) that verse from **Romans** described **Rome** perfectly!

Finally, as we come to the end of Chapter 4, let’s pause to think about the persecuted first-century Christians who were initially reading these verses. These verses are here to provide them **comfort!** They needed to know that — despite how things might have seemed to them when viewed from an earthly perspective — God was in charge, and God was ruling the universe from his throne in heaven. The first century church had **not** been forgotten. Rome was **not** going to win.

And no matter what happens in this life, the church must continue to worship and serve God. The church in these verses (represented by the twenty-four elders) offers unending praise to God. Do you mean we should praise God **during** persecution? Yes — we must offer unending praise to God, even (and, in fact, especially) during times of persecution. **Praise puts persecution into perspective!** That’s why Chapter 4 is here.

## Chapter 5

### **Revelation 5:1**

**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.**

The contents of this scroll will be revealed in the chapters that follow, but here we get a description of the scroll. It is written within and on the back, and it is sealed with seven seals.

What we sometimes call a “book” was really a scroll. Scrolls of that day were typically made of single papyrus sheets about ten by eight inches. When a long scroll was needed, the sheets were joined together horizontally. The writing was in narrow columns about three inches long. The scroll usually 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 book of Revelation would have required a scroll that was about fifteen feet long.

This scroll was written on the front and on the back. In making papyrus paper, a row of papyrus strips was laid vertically with another row of strips laid horizontally on top of them. The whole thing was then moistened with water and glued and pressed together. The side that ran horizontally was known as the recto, and the writing was done on that side because the lines of the writing ran with the lines of the fibers. The other side was called the verso and it was not commonly used for writing.

But papyrus was expensive. So, if you had a lot to write, you would write both on the front and on the back. A sheet written on the back, the verso, was called an opisthograph.

That the scroll in God’s hand was an opisthograph (written within and on the back) tells us that it contained the full will of God for his people and for Rome, the great enemy of his people. That it is **written** tells us that God’s will in this matter has been determined, and it will happen. It has been decided. There will be no deliberation and no delay. There will be no turning back.

We see similar language in the description of Ezekiel’s book of lamentations in Ezekiel 2:10 — “It had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe.” And Rome will soon find that for them the comparison with Ezekiel’s scroll goes beyond **how** it was written. For them, this scroll will also contain words of lamentation and mourning and woe.

The **seven seals** on the scroll indicate that the scroll was perfectly and completely sealed. Also, Roman law required last wills and testaments to be sealed with the seals of seven witnesses. These seven seals confirm that the scroll is straight from God; no one has tampered with it.

As of verse 1, God's plan has not yet been put into effect and has not yet been revealed. The judgments within the scroll have not yet been executed. But that is all about to change as the seals are removed one by one in the chapters that follow.

The use of a seal reminds us of Daniel 8:26, where Daniel was told to "seal up the vision, for it pertains to many days hence." The period called "many days hence" in Daniel 8:26 was in fact about four hundred years. By contrast, the seals are about to come off of this scroll, and in 22:10, John will be told **not** to seal up his book for the time is near! Again, we must ask on what basis some people argue that the events in this scroll have not happened even to this very day — two thousand years after the seals were removed! These seals came off in the first century!

### **Revelation 5:2-5**

**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? 3 And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. 4 And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. 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.**

The question is not who is **able** to open the scroll and break its seals, but rather who is **worthy** to do those things. Whoever opens the scroll will be responsible for what follows. The word "worthy" (*axios*) literally means "of sufficient weight." The word occurs seven times in Revelation.

We will see this (or perhaps another) strong angel again in 10:1 and 18:21. In Chapter 10, the strong angel will lift his right to heaven and swear there will be no more delay, so whenever we see this strong angel we should remember the time frame of this book.

Even this “strong angel” was not worthy to open the scroll. In fact, no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was worthy. The phrase “under the earth” likely denotes the grave or the place of the dead.

***Ephesians 4:9-10** — Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into **the lower parts of the earth**? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.*

***Romans 10:7** — Who shall **descend into the deep**? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)*

Taken together, the phrase “in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth” denotes the entire universe of created beings — both living and dead. Recall, for example, what Paul wrote to the Philippians:

***Philippians 2:10** — That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.*

We also see similar language in the command of Exodus 20.

***Exodus 20:4** — Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.*

No one in all of God’s creation was worthy to open the scroll and loosen the seals. And John wept. **Why? Why did John weep?**

If the scrolls were not opened, then there would be no protection for God’s people, there would be no judgments against the enemies of God’s people, there would be no ultimate triumph for believers, and there would be no new heaven and new earth. Why did John weep? **John wept at the delay that would occur if the scroll remained sealed!**

And how would John have reacted had he been forced to read a modern commentary that says nothing in the book has yet been fulfilled even to this very

day? How would John have reacted to that delay? How many more tears would he have shed?

And what was John told to do? He was told to quit crying and look at Jesus, and **that is good advice in any circumstances!** “Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah!” No one in God’s creation was worthy to open the seals; so John was told to look instead to Jesus, the eternal source of all creation.

Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah! It reminds me of Hebrews 12.

*Hebrews 12:2 — Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

What does it mean to look unto Jesus? After we are added to God’s eternal kingdom, Jesus changes how we see everything. Jesus changes how we see ourselves, how we see other people, how we see the earth, how we see our material possessions — everything. If we want to see things as God sees them, we need to see those things in the light of Christ — we need to look unto Jesus. C.S. Lewis explained this very well:

We believe that the sun is in the sky at midday in summer not because we can clearly see the sun (in fact, we cannot) but because we can see everything else.

Jesus is like the sun — it is only by the light of Jesus that we can see things as they really are. Absent that light, we are living in darkness. Everything about us is determined by how we see Jesus.

*John 8:12 — Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

*John 12:35-36 — Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.*

**John 12:46** — *I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.*

And note where each of these verses comes from — **the book of John**. This theme of seeing things as God sees them is not confined to the book of Revelation; it is also a central theme in the book of John. John's eyes had been opened, and he wanted everyone else to have their eyes opened as well.

We see three descriptions of Jesus in verse 5: the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, and we are told that he **“hath prevailed”** (past tense). Let's look at each of those three descriptions.

The lion is the most often named animal in the Bible, yet only here in the Bible is the lion given an unmistakable Messianic meaning. The Lion of the tribe of Judah is used here as a Messianic title. We know that Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14), and we recall the description of Judah found in Genesis 49.

**Genesis 49:9-10** — *Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? **The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.***

The Root of David is also a Messianic title. We know that Jesus descended from David according to the flesh (Romans 1:3). And we recall Isaiah 11, speaking of David's father, Jesse.

**Isaiah 11:1,10** — *And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, **and a Branch shall grow out of his roots** ... And in that day there shall be **a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.***

Finally, Jesus is described in verse 5 as the one who **hath** (past tense) prevailed or conquered to open the book. **Not** that he is about to conquer, but that he has already conquered. Jesus is not opening the scroll so that he can prevail; Jesus is opening the scroll because he has already prevailed. Again, we can turn to the gospel of John:

**John 16:33** — *I have overcome the world.*

The tense of that verb is **past** tense. Yes, it was spoken prior to the cross, but it was spoken just prior to the cross and in anticipation of what Jesus was about to endure in laying down his life for his sheep. **Here is the key point** — Jesus overcame the world long before the events we are now reading about. There is no great battle between good and evil in the book of Revelation with an uncertain outcome. **The outcome is never in doubt because the outcome has already occurred!** Later in Revelation 12:8 we will be told that the dragon (Satan) “prevailed not.” Satan was defeated at the cross.

**Jesus conquered Rome at the cross!** In fact, Jesus was conquering Rome at the very point that Rome thought that it was conquering Jesus.

And if we follow the example of Christ, then the world may see our great victory as a great defeat! What spiritual eyes see as a great victory is often seen by physical eyes as a great defeat. Once again, things are not always what they seem!

What is the purpose of the beautiful picture of Christ that we find in these verses? This picture emphasizes how great a thing it is to which Christ is here called. He will protect and sustain the kingdom that he died to create — and likewise he will protect and sustain us today. Jesus loves his church!

Finally, it is self evident that God did not need to search for someone to open the scroll. God did not need to search for Christ. The searching and the waiting are presented for dramatic effect. The angel in verse 2 knew the answer to his question before he asked it!

The book of Revelation is written to have an emotional impact upon the reader. That is why we see these dramatic images and vivid symbols. That is why we see the dramatic tension in these verses. And did it have an emotional impact on its initial readers? Yes — and a particularly strong one. Just look at verse 4: **“And I wept much.”**

### **Revelation 5:6-8**

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

John looks over expecting to see the great heroic lion that will unloose the seals and save the day, but what does John see? **He sees, not a Lion, but a lamb.**

In fact, John sees a little lamb standing as it had been slain. **Where is the power in that? Again, things are not always what they seem!**

Three words in the New Testament are translated lamb: **aren, amnos, and ar-nion**. The first word occurs only in Luke 10:3, the second occurs four times in John, Acts, and 1 Peter. The third word for lamb occurs twenty nine times in Revelation, 28 of which are in reference to Jesus. (The other use in Revelation is in 13:11.) The only other place where this word for lamb appears in the New Testament is in John 21:15 where Jesus asks Peter to “feed My lambs.”

The Greek word for lamb used twenty eight times in reference to Christ in Revelation means “**little** lamb.” A better English translation would be “lambkin,” and this book applies that word to Christ twenty eight times. To the world, it would be hard to image something more vulnerable and more defenseless than a baby lamb. **But, again, things are not always what they seem!**

Yes, the church will be victorious — but as with the Lamb of God, that victory will come through sacrifice.

***Matthew 16:25** — For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.*

***1 John 5:4** — This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

The victory of the church did not then and does not today come through physical force or through great demonstrations of earthly power. Our victory

comes through faith. Our victory comes through giving up our life for Christ. **Faith is the victory! And the path to victory is faithfulness unto death.**

What is meant by the phrase “as it had been slain”? It means that the Lamb had the marks of slaughter upon it. It does **not** mean that the Lamb merely looked like it had been slain; it means that the Lamb had been slain. And the marks of that event were still evident upon it. But this **slain** lamb is **standing** — a vision of **victory** through sacrifice and suffering.

This Lamb, of course, is Jesus who overcame the world through his perfect sacrifice.

*John 1:29 — Behold **the Lamb of God**, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

*1 Corinthians 5:7 — For Christ, **our Passover lamb**, has been sacrificed. [ESV]*

*1 Peter 1:18-19 — Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, **as of a lamb** without blemish and without spot.*

*Isaiah 53:7 — He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought **as a lamb** to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*

Jesus is the Lamb of God. He conquered not by force but by death — his own death on the cross. He conquered not by taking the lives of others — but by laying down his life.

*John 10:14-15 — I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: **and I lay down my life for the sheep.***

Jesus conquered not as a lion but as a lamb, and by this example his disciples must also conquer.

We tend to see a lamb as a docile and helpless creature, but we will find that this lamb is very different. **We need to remember that this lamb is also a lion!** Later, in Revelation 6:16, we will read about “**the wrath of the Lamb**”

(literally, the wrath of the lambkin!), which is certainly one of the most remarkable and terrifying phrases in all of the Bible.

Why does this lamb have **seven horns**? We saw that same symbol in our study of Daniel and in our study of Zechariah. Horns depict power. The seven horns here depict Jesus' complete and perfect power. Later in Revelation (as in Daniel) we will see that horns are used to depict kings. So these seven horns also depict the perfect royalty of Christ and his complete sovereignty as King over all things.

The Lamb also has **seven eyes**, which are the seven spirits of God. We looked at this symbol earlier, and we saw that the seven spirits there depicted the Holy Spirit. That is true here as well, but this symbol also shows us that Jesus knows what is happening to his people — he has perfect knowledge about all things. He has seven eyes; he misses nothing.

The “golden vials full of odours” are the prayers of the saints. We will see later that everything in this book came about as a result of the prayers of the saints. **We should notice something wonderful about these prayers — while despised on earth, these prayers are brought to God in golden bowls.** The picture here reminds us of Psalm 141.

*Psalm 141:2 — Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.*

A central lesson for us today from this book is the **power of prayer**. We will soon see that this judgment against Rome is happening because of the prayers by God's people. Yes, we are to love our enemies and pray for them, but sometimes that prayer can be that God will judge them, and perhaps in that judgment they will finally see the error of their ways.

Notice that each of the elders in verse 8 is holding a **harp**. So, I guess that means harps can be used in our worship service, right? **Wrong!**

We know from elsewhere in the New Testament that God's chosen instrument for worship in the new kingdom is the human voice and the use of anything else is contrary to the pattern that God left for us to follow. Remember one of our interpretative rules — however we interpret this difficult book of Revelation, that interpretation must not contradict what we find elsewhere in the Bible, and particularly what we find in very easy to understand verses elsewhere in the Bible.

**Why then do we see harps in these verses?** Remember that what we are seeing here are **symbols**. This language is figurative. For example, only in a vision could a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes take a scroll from someone's hand. **These harps are symbols for praise, just as the incense is a symbol for prayer.** We will see a similar symbol in 14:2 — “and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps.”

Why use a harp to depict praise? Because we praise God using the harp made by God — the human voice — and that harp was **not** made with human hands.

*Acts 17:24-25 — God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.*

Sometimes proponents of instrumental music in worship wonder why God would not be pleased with such things. The answer to that question is given by the verse we just read from Acts 17. **The eternal kingdom is not made with men's hands — and for that reason God is not to be worshipped with men's hands. Man-made churches use man-made instruments in worship, but not so with the one church made without human hands!**

Instrumental music places the focus on man rather than on God — and if you don't believe that just take a look at some of the rock and roll churches you can see everyday on TV. That's the same reason we don't have special choirs in our worship. God wants all Christians to sing, and he wants us to use the instruments that he made, not instruments made with human hands and played with human hands. Only then does the focus of worship remain where it should remain — on God, who alone is worthy of our worship. **Anyone who thinks that Revelation supports the worship of God with man-made instruments is missing the entire point of this book!**

And if we were take harps in heaven as a rule of conduct for the church on earth, then on what basis do we stop there? There is no marriage in heaven (Matthew 22:30). If we take the harps, how do we hold on to marriage? And on that note, doesn't Matthew 22:30 teach us that while marriage is pleasing to God on earth, it is **not** pleasing to God in heaven? So even if these were literal harps in heaven (which they aren't), it still would not automatically follow that the use of harps in worship by the church on earth is pleasing to God.

In short, those who take this great scene of worship as evidence in favor of instrumental music in worship have it completely and absolutely backwards! This great scene of adoration and worship in Chapter 5 is strong evidence **against** such practices! God alone is worthy of worship — and he is not worshipped with men's hands (Acts 17:24-25).

In verse 7, the Lamb takes the scroll from the right hand of God. Jesus is worthy to open the scroll and do what it contains.

One commentator said that “right at this moment, we who read and study the Book of Revelation are at the theological center of the book.”

And what a message of comfort! The little lamb has the scroll! Satan does not have it. The Roman emperor does not have it. The Lamb has it. It is Jesus who holds the scroll. It is Jesus who holds history in his hand. **What do we have to fear?**