

Rev. 5:1-14

This passage is a continuation of the vision begun in chapter 4. The previous chapter was setting the scene for this chapter. Chapter 4 described God as sitting on a throne as sovereign Lord over all the universe, surrounded by creatures that demonstrated His holiness, power, omniscience, and greatness over all creation. And now, this chapter will describe how His sovereign Lordship is worked out in human history.

I. And I saw a scroll in the right hand of the One sitting upon the throne – written inside and outside, sealed with seven seals (1)

The focus of this drama starts with a scroll. This scroll, like everything else in Revelation, has its ultimate source in the One sitting on the throne (see ch. 4). It comes from His right hand.

In order to understand what is going on in this chapter, it is important to understand the nature and function of this scroll. There are various options argued by scholars. In light of the fact that it had writing on both sides (This was a common characteristic of will/testament documents in the Roman empire. A typical will had two parts: a description of the inheritance, and a list of the heirs), and in light of the larger context of this chapter, the scroll most likely represents God's purpose and plan for the universe, for human history and His inheritance and Kingdom in human history. This is probably related in some way to the "Lamb's book of life" which is referenced throughout Revelation (see 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 15, 22:19, Psa. 69:28, and Phil. 4:3). In other words, the scroll represents and contains all that God is doing and will do to bring creation to its proper conclusion – to finally defeat all evil, and to bring about the full consummation of God's Kingdom and all of its blessings for His people. It is the content of God's Kingdom purposes for history and the consummation of God's plan for history.

The phrase that the scroll was written "on the front" and "on the back" (see Ezek. 2:10) uses terms that were used in chapter 4 to talk about the creatures having eyes on their front and back. In other words, they were covered with eyes, full of eyes. So, this may indicate that this scroll was completely covered with writing, which would indicate the completeness and fullness of God's purposes contained in the scroll.

But this scroll was sealed with seven seals. The number seven typically represents completeness. So, this scroll was completely sealed up. Therefore, the consummation of God's purposes was not yet revealed and enacted. This represents history still being in the already/not yet tension, with God's full purposes not yet finished. This means that most of the events described/symbolized in the Book of Revelation (chapters 6-19) are not the content of the scroll. These events are just the preliminaries involved in breaking the seals and opening the scroll. They are the necessary final events of this age, that need to take place before the consummation of the age to come. In 20:12, at the final judgment, the scrolls are finally said to be opened. Therefore, the content of the scroll will only be fully revealed in the events at the end of the Book of Revelation, in the New Heavens and the New Earth, with the New Jerusalem coming down from God. This eternal blessing is what is represented by the content of the scroll, and it won't be fully revealed and realized until after God judges and eliminates all evil and rivals to His perfect reign.

II. The quest to find One worthy to fulfill God's purposes (2-5)

A. No one was found to fulfill God's purposes, and therefore, John grieved (2-4)

1. Heaven sought who would fulfill God's purposes, but found no one (2-3)

a A powerful angel issued a challenge to fulfill God's purposes (2)

1) And I saw a powerful angel (2a)

The angel is described as "powerful" or "strong" primarily in reference to its ability to proclaim in a voice loud enough to be heard throughout all the world.

2) Proclaiming a challenge to open the scroll and fulfill God's purposes (2b-e)

a) Proclaiming in a loud voice (2b)

This proclamation was a challenge to go out to all the universe, and so, it was made in a voice strong enough to be heard by all intelligent creatures in all the world and in heaven.

b) "Who is worthy to open the scroll?" (2c-e)

(1) Who is worthy? (2c)

One of the purposes of this challenge is obviously to find the One Who would be worthy to open the scroll and bring God's purposes to their intended conclusion. Of course, God already knew Who this was, because God had already planned all of this – the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world (see 13:8). But this was the way that God would reveal the Lamb as the One Who would fulfill His purposes. And the primary purpose of this challenge was to confront all creatures that we are *not* worthy to open the scrolls. The term "worthy" means to be of a degree of competency, merit and worth to fulfill this role and task. Just like in the Old Testament, through the prophets, God confronted the false gods that they were not in control of history (e.g. Isa. 41:22-23). They were not competent and powerful enough to challenge God's role as sovereign Lord. And throughout Revelation, the readers are encouraged to reject the false pretenders and worship the One True God. So, in this passage, God confronts all creation that we also are not in control of history. We are not worthy to bring about God's purposes. We are not the focus of God's plans (even though, by His grace, we have a part in them). We are not the hero of the story or the main character in this drama. We are not the agents that will bring about God's purposes. Creation is not about us. No one is worthy except the One that will be revealed in the following verses. The One sitting upon the throne is sovereign over all the universe, and the One Who is found worthy will be found to share in God's throne.

(2) Specifically: worthy to open the scroll (2d-e)

(a) To open the scroll (2d)

To open the scroll is to access and thereby enact what is written in it. If (as argued above) the scroll contains God's purpose and plan to bring His Kingdom to consummation, then opening the scroll is to fulfill all of God's plans and promises, and to bring this age of human history to an end, and bring about the fullness of the next age.

(b) And to break its seals (2e)

Seals were official marks closing a document, and therefore, signified punishment for any unauthorized person breaking the seal. Only those with the proper right and authority – those "worthy" – could break the seals, and only at the proper time. So, the one who could break the seals and open the scroll is the One with authority and ability to bring God's purposes to completion at the right time.

b No one in creation was found worthy to open the scroll (3)

1) And no one in heaven, neither on the earth, neither under the earth was able (3a)

Even though this challenge went out to the entire creation, no one was found worthy. This confirms the purpose of the challenge – to clearly demonstrate that no creature is worthy and able to bring about God’s purposes. No one on earth was found worthy – that is, no human leader, no matter how smart, powerful, or influential. No one under the earth was found worthy – that is, no deceased hero from the past. No great statesman or leader from history is worthy (not even David, or Abraham, or Moses), no matter how godly and influential they may have been. And no one in heaven was found worthy – that is, no angel or supernatural creature. Even the living creatures that live in God’s presence are not worthy to bring God’s plan to its climax and completion.

2) Specifically: able to open the scroll and complete God’s purposes (3b-c)

a) To open the scroll (3b)

This is the same phrase as 2d above. It is repeated for emphasis. Opening the scroll is a big deal in this passage (and throughout Revelation) because it sets in motion the final events which lead to the completion and consummation of God’s Kingdom purposes for human history. This is seen in chapters 6-8 where the opening of each of the seven seals is narrated, along with the consequences of breaking each seal.

b) Neither to see it (3c)

This phrase is different than what might have been expected from 2d-e. The emphasis is that no one is able even to see and know God’s purposes for history, let alone bring it about. Not only are we all unable to fulfill God’s plan, but we are in the dark as to what His plans are. All we know is what He has already told us in other parts of Scripture, and then only in part. We are not able to independently know what God will bring about.

2. John grieved because no one was found to complete God’s purposes (4)

a And I wept intensely (4a)

This word “wept” and the modifying word “intensely” indicate an extreme form of crying. That is loud, passionate, wailing and lamenting. Why did John weep? Was he just emotional or overdramatic? No. But why was this such a big deal? Understanding why John was so distraught is a key to understanding this passage. And the reason is given in the following propositions.

b Because no one could open the scroll and complete God's purposes (4b-d)

This section gives the reason why John wept.

1) Because no one worthy was found (4b)

If no one is able to break the seals and open the scroll, then God's purposes will remain unknown and unaccomplished. Millions of injustices will not be righted. The martyrs will not be avenged. If the scroll is not opened, then God is unconnected and unconcerned and distant, History would have no meaning. Our lives will have no meaning. Nothing will have any meaning if no one can open the scroll and bring God's plan to completion, because in that case, nothing will have a purpose and a goal. And by the way, this is the conclusion of our secular culture: that life has no designer, it is just random, with everyone making up their own meaning. Therefore, for this worldview, life has no meaning or purpose, so nothing matters. This is why our culture is filled with such selfishness and despair.

We also should feel the weight of this sadness and grief. We are all groaning, with creation, waiting for the time when God will right every wrong and bring history to its just conclusion. We all know that things are not yet right, and we are hoping for the time when our world will be fixed. We know that our own personal history (as well as world history) is unfinished business, and we long for the time when God will bring our salvation to its intended conclusion. But if there is no one who can and will do this, then that would be cause for intense grief and despair.

2) Specifically: no one worthy to open the scroll and complete God's purposes (4c-d)

These two propositions are the same as 3b-c, repeated to keep focus on the inability of anyone to complete, or even to know God's purposes for history.

a) To open the scroll (4c)

This is the same phrase as 3b. See the comments on that proposition.

b) Neither to see it (4d)

This is the same phrase as 3c. See the comments there.

B. The response: Don't weep, the Lion has triumphed (5)

It was totally appropriate for John to grieve at that point in the story. But thankfully, the story was not finished. John was about to be given more information that would turn his weeping into joy. And this reflects the larger purpose of the Book of Revelation. The readers were in a time of intense persecution and suffering, and so were rightly grieving and tempted to despair. But they were being given more information, which they did not yet have, through the Revelation given through John. This new information – this new way of looking at their same situation – would turn their grief to joy, if they truly understood and believed the whole truth about what was happening, which they did not yet see.

1. And one from the elders said to me: (5a)

That is, one of the 24 elders surrounding God's throne, who were introduced in 4:4. The elder spoke to John as an intermediary from God Himself.

2. Don't weep, because the Lion has triumphed to open the scroll (5b-d)

a Do not weep (5b)

Obviously, this is a command to stop mourning and weeping. The sadness which was the appropriate response to what John had seen, was about to be shown to be inappropriate, based on new information, which was about to be revealed.

- b Because the Lion of Judah has triumphed to open the scroll (5c-d)
- 1) Behold, the Lion, the One from the tribe of Judah, the root of David has triumphed (5c)

“Behold” is a marker of emphasis. It drew John’s attention, and focused it on the reason he should no longer weep. He was to notice and pay attention to the Lion and the fact that He had triumphed.

Jesus is described in two ways in this proposition: 1) the Lion from the tribe of Judah, and 2) the Root of David. The “Lion from the tribe of Judah” is a reference to Gen. 49:9-10, where the tribe of Judah is described as a lion that is strong and conquers its prey. And then a ruler from Judah is predicted, Who will receive the obedience of nations. And the “Root of David” refers back to Isa. 11:1, 10 (see also Jer. 23:5-6, Rom. 15:12), where a “root” from David’s family will bear fruit, explained as nations rallying to His leadership. A descendant of David will rule the nations. And Jesus referred to Himself as the “root of David” in 22:16.

Out of these prophecies, and out of the other prophecies connected with a descendant of King David (who was from the tribe of Judah) came the idea that the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah, and rule over the nations. And this verse proclaims that those prophecies had been fulfilled. The promised redeemer has arrived, not only to rule the nations, but to open the scroll and fulfill God’s purposes. He has prevailed in the struggle and won!

The identity of this lion is not yet explicitly mentioned in this passage. But the New Testament often emphasized that Jesus was descended from David (from the tribe of Judah). And the fact that the lion symbolizes Jesus will be made clear in the following verses.

This lion is said to have triumphed – to have been victorious over some obstacle or enemy.

This is the same word used in chapters 2-3 in the promises to the “one who *overcomes*.”

There, the readers were encouraged to overcome. And now we learn that they can overcome because the lion has already overcome. And the result of His victory/overcoming is elaborated in the next proposition.

- 2) To open the scroll and its seven seals (5d)

This proposition does not yet describe *how* the lion has overcome. But it describes the result: He can do that which no creature could do – open the scroll and fulfill God’s purposes. What John hoped for had indeed happened. So, he could stop weeping and begin rejoicing with all the universe in the victory of the lion/lamb which is described more fully in the next section.

III. Vision of the slaughtered Lamb – worthy to take and open the scroll (6-10)

A. I saw a victorious slaughtered Lamb sharing the role of God (6)

1. I looked/saw (6a)

This is a common transition phrase in Revelation. It serves to highlight and draw attention to the next part of the vision revealed.

2. A slaughtered Lamb was on God's throne (6b-f)

This section is a continuation of the revelation of the victory of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The Lion is the Lamb, and the Lamb is the Lion. We are not supposed to visualize some blended creature that is half lion and half lamb. The Book of Revelation often combines symbols, not in the sense of mixing metaphors, but rather, of adding one metaphor on to another, so that the combined truth of all the symbols tells the fuller picture about the thing which is symbolized. Therefore, Jesus is not part lion and part lamb. Rather, He is all lion and all lamb. He is not a wimpy lamb, but a Kingly, strong, warrior Lamb. He is not a beastly Lion, but a gentle, humble Lion, Who gives of Himself. All of the things symbolized by a lion are true of Him. He is strong and regal to rule. He is victorious over all His enemies. But all of the things that will be symbolized by a lamb in this section are true of Him as well. Part of the way that He is victorious is that He gave Himself as a sacrificial offering on behalf of the sins of His people.

John wrote in such a way as to underscore the continuity between these two symbolic representations of Christ. But also, to show the contrast and significance of this second way that Jesus is symbolically represented in this vision, and what this tells us about His mission and the nature of His victory and accomplishments. One would have expected that a lion would be victorious by means of conquering violence. But John shows that Jesus was victorious by being the victim of violence. He rules as a Lion because He died as a Lamb. The voice of the elder announced that the Lion was victorious. And, against expectations, John saw a slaughtered Lamb.

a I saw a slaughtered Lamb standing in the middle of God's throne (6b-c)

1) In the middle of the throne and the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb was standing (6b)

In chapter 4, the throne room of Heaven was described with God's throne at the center, and a series of concentric circles moving outward, which contained a variety of heavenly creatures (see the comments there). This verse refers back to that description in order to emphasize that the Lamb which John saw was at the center of this reality, at the same place as God and His throne. The Lamb was further in than the elders and the living creatures. The Lamb was in the middle of the throne, with God. Or this may be better expressed as the Lamb being seated in God's place on the throne in order to emphasize that the Lamb *is* God. "The Lamb" is obviously referring to Christ, and will be used to designate Him throughout the rest of this book (see v. 8, 12, 6:1, 16, 7:9, 14, 18, 12:11, 13:8, 14:1, 4, 10, 15:3, 17:14, 19:7, 9, 21:9, 14, 22, 27, 22:1, 3). This is another evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity in John's writings. The Lamb (Who symbolizes Jesus, as we will soon see) is equal with God, sharing His throne. Yet, the Lamb is in some way distinguished from God the Father. This fits well with the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, and does not make much sense otherwise. There is almost certainly no contrast between the One "*sitting* on the throne" and the mention that the Lamb was "*standing*." The word "standing" often does not have any connotation of being in an upright posture. Rather, it just means to be in a place. So, here, it most likely does not indicate that the lamb was in a standing position. Rather, it could best be translated, "a Lamb was positioned there" or "a Lamb was there."

2) As having been slaughtered (6c)

There is great significance in the description of the Lamb as having been slaughtered. The word “slaughtered” refers to a violent death. And this, connected with the typical use of a lamb as a sacrificial animal, refers to the Old Testament sacrificial system, where a lamb was often killed as a sacrifice in order to provide atonement for God’s people. More specifically, this is a reference to the suffering servant in Isa. 53:7-8, who was led “like a lamb to the slaughter” for the transgression of God’s people.

It is clear from the context of the rest of the New Testament that this is a reference to the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. In John 1:29, Jesus was called the “Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world.” And Peter wrote that we were redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Pet. 1:19). And this will be validated and elaborated in the following verses. And throughout the rest of Revelation (see v. 9, 12, 13:8), Jesus is called “the Lamb that was slain.”

b He had the symbols of all power and all knowledge (6d-f)

John continued the symbolic description of Jesus as a Lamb by using typical symbols to speak of His power and knowledge.

1) Having seven horns and seven eyes (6d)

“Horns” are a regular symbol for power (see 1 Sam. 2:10, Psa. 132:17, Ezek. 29:21, Luke 1:69). And the number seven usually symbolizes fullness, completeness, and perfection. Therefore, the Lamb is said to have the fullness and perfection of power. The Lamb is all powerful. And therefore, He is stronger than all pretenders to earthly power. Later in Revelation, evil beasts are said to have ten horns, and attempt to challenge the rule of the Lamb (see 12:3, 13:1, 11, 17:3, 7, 12, 16). In math, 10 is greater than 7. However, in this symbolism, having 10 horns represents a lot of power, but 7 horns refers to the fullness of power. So, the Lamb is infinitely more powerful than the challenging evil beasts, even though they have significant power.

And as we saw in the previous chapter (see 4:6, 8), “eyes” are a symbol for knowledge. With the perfect number of eyes, the Lamb is aware of everything that happens in the world, and so, the Lamb, like God is all knowing.

2) Explanation: these are the seven spirits sent out to all the world (6e-f)

a) These are the seven Spirits of God (6e)

In 4:5, the seven torches before God’s throne were said to be “the seven Spirits of God” (see also 1:4, 3:1). Here, the seven eyes of the Lamb are equated with the same thing. All of these together refer back to Zech. 4:2, 10. Zech. 4:10 speaks of “the seven eyes of the Lord that range throughout the earth.” Therefore, the seven spirits symbolize the all-searching, all-seeing, and therefore, all-knowing character of God and the Lamb.

b) Sent out into all the earth (6f)

This is a continuation of the reference to Zech. 4:10, where the “seven eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth” (see also 2 Chron. 16:9). The emphasis is the exhaustiveness of the Lamb’s perfect knowledge. There is no part of the universe that He does not intimately know and control. Notice also, that the Lamb (Christ) is equated with the Lord God of the Old Testament, which is yet another confirmation of the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity.

B. The Lamb took the scroll and all Heaven responded with joy and worship (7-10)

1. He went and took the scroll from God on the throne (7)

a And He went (7a)

This is a subordinate action, which is not very significant on its own. John only mentions this as a preparation for the next proposition. Therefore, we should not find any significance in the fact that the Lamb moved. There is no elaboration of where He moved or how far, which would suggest that this does not have any meaning beyond setting up for the next action.

b And He took [the scroll] from the right hand of the One sitting upon the throne (7b)

The taking of the scroll is the climax of this entire vision. All of chapter 4 set the scene for this drama, and chapter five starts with highlighting the scroll in the right hand of the One seated on the throne. All of this chapter so far has led up to this point. And the rest of this chapter describes the reaction and result of the Lamb taking the scroll. Then, beginning in chapter 6 with the opening of each of the seven seals, and continuing through chapter 20, Revelation narrates the results of the Lamb receiving the scroll, opening it, and putting in motion the purposes and plans contained in the scroll. And then chapters 21-22 narrate the contents of the scroll – the eternal blessing of God’s people in His presence.

On the one hand, the action of taking an article from someone else is not a very dramatic action. We all have done this. On the other hand, the significance of this action is in the particular article that is taken (the inheritance scroll containing God’s purposes for His universe) and the identity of the One Who took it (The Lion/Lamb, Who is worthy). As we have seen, the scroll represents God’s plan and purposes for the consummation of all of history, and so taking the scroll symbolizes the beginning of the consummation. All of God’s good purposes are now in the final preparation for complete accomplishment.

And, as I mentioned, the simple action of taking something in hand is not a big deal. But in this case, the fact of *being worthy* to take this particular scroll is a world-changing accomplishment. It was the demonstration that He had completed His perfect, effective work – that His sacrifice had been accepted. No one else in all of creation was found worthy. The scroll was not taken in the sense of forceful robbery. But rather the sense is that God willingly handed it over to the proper recipient, Who received it from Him. As we’ll see in later verses, the Lamb is considered worthy to take the scroll at least partly because He was slain and purchased people for God.

The taking of the scroll is an extremely dramatic and climactic event in history because the cross and resurrection were THE dramatic and climactic events in all of history. The cross is where the action took place, and the taking of the scroll is the consequence of the cross. God’s good purposes in history will be consummated because God’s good plan of the cross has already taken place in history. All the events symbolized and described in the book of Revelation are the application and working out of the consequences of the Gospel, which had already been accomplished in history by the time of the writing of Revelation. John is just encouraging his readers that all the consequences of the Gospel are now in process of being worked out, even when it seems that evil is winning. The result of the atonement and resurrection is the consummation of all things, which is already in motion, as symbolized by the Lamb taking the scroll.

2. When He took the scroll, Heaven rejoiced and worshipped, because He is worthy (8-10)

This section describes the response to the Lamb taking the scroll. Because of all this represented – because it was such a world changing event, the reaction in heaven is extremely dramatic as well.

a When He took the scroll, Heaven rejoiced and worshipped (8)

1) And when He took the scroll (8a)

This proposition just connects the following actions with the previous proposition. All that happens next is the result of, and response to, the Lamb taking the scroll.

2) The heavenly beings worshipped with joy and prayers (8b-d)

a) The four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the Lamb (8b)

The four living creatures and 24 elders were introduced in chapter four as heavenly creatures that surround God's throne to serve and worship Him. Now we see that their response to the taking of the scroll is to fall down before the Lamb in order to worship. They fell as a sign of devotion and humility, before someone of higher rank (see v. 14, 4:10, 7:11, 19:4). The fact that the Lamb is the object of worship in heaven, alongside of the One sitting on the throne, is another evidence for the deity of Christ. One of God's Ten Commandments was that no other god beside Him was to be worshipped. For the creatures to fall before the Lamb would have been blasphemy if the Lamb was not God.

b) They had a harp and golden bowls representing prayer (8c-d)

John mentioned these two propositions in order to symbolize the manner and type of their worship before the Lamb.

(1) Each had a harp and golden bowls filled with incense (8c)

Each of the four living creatures and the 24 elders had the same implements (and by extension, the same attitude and actions) of worship. John emphasized that they all worshipped in the same way.

First, they each had a harp – which is most likely what we would call a lyre, a smaller hand-held string instrument (not the large harps usually used in orchestras). The harp was the instrument that signified joy and celebration. And so, their worship was characterized by celebration of the accomplishment of the Lamb and an attitude of great joy. Heaven is a happy place, because God's greatness and justice, which are sometimes hidden on earth, have been made fully manifest in the glory and justice of the Lamb.

And they each had a golden bowl filled with incense. Bowls were common articles used in the Old Testament temple worship. And the fact that they were made of gold symbolized the value and purity of the offering (which implied the value and purity of the One to Whom the offering was given). Incense is a spice that smells good when it is burned. It was used in the Old Testament to symbolize prayers going up to God. And it is used in the same way in this verse, as explained in the next proposition.

(2) Which are the prayers of the saints (8d)

This proposition explains the golden bowls filled with incense. As typical, incense is a symbol for prayers going up to God (see Psa. 141:2). But in this context, they take an even greater significance. Later in Revelation (6:9-11) the people of God are described as crying out for justice, because they had been persecuted and killed for their faith. They prayed for vindication and justice. Then in 8:3-4, the prayers of the saints are again offered up to God as punishment is being thrown to earth. So, it is significant that the prayers of the suffering, persecuted saints are included in the worship of the Lamb, just as He had received the scroll and was beginning to bring about the consummation, which includes their vindication, justice, and eternal reward. Their prayers actually made it to the throne of God. Their prayers had been effective, and had been answered by the Lamb taking the scroll.

b They worshipped the Lamb because He is worthy (9-10)

The previous verse emphasized the fact that the heavenly beings worshipped the Lamb. Now, these two verses are a continuation of that theme, but concentrate more on *why* they worshipped the Lamb. In other words, the bulk of these verses relates why the Lamb is worthy of worship. This is a typical pattern in the Psalms, where a command to praise the Lord is followed by reasons why He is worthy of our praise.

1) And they sang a new song (9a)

Part of the heavenly worship was/is musical praise singing. Throughout the Bible, we get the sense that this kind of musical worship is continual around God's throne. But the focus in this verse is that they sang a *new* song. This phrase "a new song" has nothing to do with a different form or style of music, or even of different lyrics than had been sung before. There certainly is a place in the right context for fresh styles and arrangements for worship. But this verse is not addressing that issue at all.

Whenever the Bible talks about singing a new song, it is in the context of God having done something new to sing about (see 14:3, Psa. 33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 98:1, 144:9, 149:1, Isa. 42:10). In other words, the new song is the response to something new that God has done – God's people have experienced a new facet of God's salvation to sing about. This is certainly the case in these verses. The content of the new song is in response to the revelation of the worthiness of the Lamb and His taking of the scroll. All heaven responds in a new manner of worship because the Lamb has overcome by His death and resurrection, and is now beginning to bring all of God's Gospel purposes to consummation. If Jesus had not died and risen, God's purposes would not be fulfilled. There would not be a single redeemed person. But Christ *has* died and risen! Therefore, there is a dramatic new thing to sing about. And so, heaven sang a new song.

2) Proclaiming the Lamb is worthy and the reason why (9b-10)

a) Saying: (9b)

This is just a discourse marker, introducing the content of the new song that was sung, as related in the rest of these two verses.

b) The Lamb is worthy to open the scroll b/c He purchased the consummation and destiny of His people (9c-10)

(1) The Lamb is worthy to open the scroll (9c-e)

This section is basically repeating back to the Lamb the question from above: “Who is worthy to open the scroll?” (see v. 2) and the answer: “The Lion of the tribe of Judah has overcome to open the scroll” (see v. 5). The truth that the Lion/Lamb is the answer to that question is ground for exuberant worship, because of the implications about the worthiness of the Lamb, and because of all the gracious benefits this brings to His people, ultimately bringing glory to the Lamb.

(a) You are worthy (9c)

See the comments above on v. 2 for the concept of being worthy. This phrase was also used in 4:11 in praise to the One sitting on the throne, describing why He is worthy of worship. It will also be repeated in v. 12 of this chapter, continuing the worship of the Lamb.

(b) Specifically: what the Lamb is worthy to do (9d-e)

(i) To take the scroll (9d)

This proposition echoes 7b and 8a where the Lamb took the scroll from the One sitting on the throne. See the comments on those propositions.

(ii) And to open its seals (9e)

This proposition echoes 2d-e, 3b, 4d, and 5e. See the comments there.

(2) Reasons the Lamb is worthy: (9f-10)

This section lists some of the (infinite) reasons why the Lamb is worthy to open the scroll, and consequently is worthy of our worship. They focus primarily on the cross of Christ, what the cross accomplished, and how this procured a destiny for God’s people.

(a) Because You were slaughtered (9f)

On “slaughtered,” see the comments on 6c. It is not just the fact that He died, or the manner in which He died, that made Him worthy. For thousands of people died on Roman crosses, and multitudes more have been slain in various other ways, and this did not make them worthy of worship. It is because He was an innocent substitutionary sacrifice voluntarily offered on behalf of other people. He had no sin for which He should die. And so, He could offer Himself to pay the penalty for the sin of others. And He is an infinite being, because He is God incarnate. And so, His death was an infinite sacrifice, sufficient to cover the sins of all His people. The meaning, purpose, and result of His death, as a substitutionary sacrifice to make atonement for sinners, is the reason why the Lamb is worthy of worship.

(b) And You purchased to God by Your blood [people] from every tribe and language and people and nation (9g)

This proposition is a continuation of the previous thought – giving the result of the Lamb being slaughtered, which is another reason why the Lamb is worthy. By being slaughtered, the Lamb provided atonement and redemption for His people, buying them back from the punishment and slavery of their sin by paying the price for their freedom. The New Testament regularly speaks of God’s people being purchased by Christ, using the language of redemption and ransom (see 14:4, Matt. 20:28, Acts. 20:28, 1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23, Eph. 1:7, Col. 1:14, Titus 2:14, 1 Pet. 1:18-19). And they were purchased with His blood (see 1:5, 7:14).

And the people who are redeemed come from every tribe and language and people and nation (see 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, 17:15). These four words cover the various ways that humanity can be categorized. And God’s people are represented in all groups in all of these categories. “Tribe” refers to large groups of people who are biologically related. It is an extended family, which is a subgroup of a nation by being more closely related. “Language” refers to groups of people who all speak the same native language. All language groups are/will be represented among God’s people. “People” refers to groups of people who are united by common customs and cultural bonds. They may not be related biologically, but because they all share common customs and worldview, they are considered together as a people. And “nation” is a community united by a common political and social reality. This is the largest unit into which the people of the world are categorized. A nation may be made up of people with different biological backgrounds, different languages, and different customs, but they are united by being under the same political structure. The people purchased by the Lamb are truly representative of all subgroups of humanity in all of these categories. Not every person in every subgroup is part of God’s people, but every subgroup is represented.

(c) And You gave Your people a calling and destiny (10)

(i) And You made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God (10a)

Not only are God’s people saved from the penalty of our sin. We are also saved for a purpose and destiny. We are made to be a Kingdom. The New Testament has consistently spoken about the coming of the Kingdom of God in Christ. And here we are told that the Lamb is worthy because He has made His people into that Kingdom. And we are also priests to our God (see 1:6, 20:6, 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). We have been restored to the priestly role of serving God and being mediators to the rest of creation. This is a fulfillment of the promise in Exo. 19:6, that His people will be a “kingdom of priest and a holy nation.” The details of how this works out are not spelled out in detail, but part of the consummation is realizing the fullness of our priestly ministry and the benefits of being citizens of His Kingdom, as well as somehow taking part in His rule, as described in the next proposition.

(ii) **And they will rule upon the earth (10b)**

The sacrifice of the Lamb has brought about God's plan to restore His people to their calling as rulers over all His creation (see 20:4-6, 22:5, Dan. 7:27, Rom. 5:17). In the beginning, God created mankind to be His representatives, to steward and rule over His creation, because we are created in His image. But sin corrupted that image and sidetracked that calling, so that ever since, we have been in a broken relationship with creation, and creation has been groaning, waiting for the redemption and restoration of the children of God (Rom. 8:19-21). And the atonement of the Lamb has brought about the restoration to this calling.

The Lamb is worthy to be praised, because He has graciously brought about all these benefits for His people.

IV. Everything worshipped the Lamb (11-14)

The previous section focused on the Lamb being revealed as the One Who is worthy and Who took the scroll in order to bring God's purposes in history to their consummation. And part of that section was the heavenly court responding with worship to the Lamb. This section continues the response of worship, but it concentrates exclusively on the worship of the Lamb, and expands it to include all of Heaven and all of creation as well. Everything worships the Lamb, because He is worthy.

It may seem that this section goes more closely with verses 8-10 because they all describe the response of worship to the Lamb taking the scroll. However, I have connected vv. 8-10 with verse 7 and separated vv. 11-14 as a separate paragraph. The reason I have outlined this passage in this way is that John included the transition phrase "And I looked" in v. 11, which is a typical signal for a new topic of revelation. John has signaled a change of topic and I have tried to reflect that in this outline.

A. All of Heaven praised the Lamb (11-12)

1. And I looked (11a)

This, again, is the common transitional phrase in Revelation. See the comment on 6a.

2. I heard innumerable creatures praising the Lamb (11b-12)

There are two main ideas in this section: 1) the description of the vast array of heavenly creatures that praised the Lamb, and 2) the content of their praise, which proclaims that the Lamb is worthy and why.

a I heard innumerable angels and other creatures (11b-c)

1) And I heard a sound of many angels around the throne and of the living creatures and of the elders (11b)

This is a listing of the heavenly creatures that were (and still are) praising the Lamb. John mentioned the sound that he heard, which will be elaborated in v. 12. But he quickly transitioned to describing the source of the sound – the vast crowd of heavenly creatures around God's throne. First, he mentioned many angels around the throne, which had not yet been mentioned in this vision. The mention of the angels dramatically multiplied the number of creatures described around God's throne, as will be explicitly highlighted in the next proposition. Next, John again specifically mentioned the four living creatures, which had been introduced back in 4:6 and were mentioned throughout this vision (see 4:7, 8, 9, 5:6, 8, 14). And finally, John listed the twenty-four elders, which had been introduced back in 4:4 (see also 4:10, 5:5, 6, 8, 14). These all represent supernatural heavenly creatures that are around God's throne to serve and worship Him.

2) And their number was uncountables of uncountables, and thousands of thousands (11c)

The point of this proposition is to emphasize how large was the crowd of heavenly creatures praising around God's throne. There are two phrases with the same structure used to define the number of these creatures. The first phrase is "uncountables of uncountables." The word "uncountables" is literally the word "myriad," which was the largest number designation in that language. It sometimes meant "ten thousand" when referring to an accurate counting. But it often was used to signify a number so large that it could not accurately be counted. That is most likely the way the word was being used in this verse. And the formula is " x of x 's," which means x number of groups of x 's. In other words, it means " x times x number of things." So, I have rendered it "an uncountable number of uncountable numbers" or "an uncountable number times an uncountable number." And the second phrase is in a similar structure. It is "thousands of thousands" or "a thousand times a thousand." These two phrases together obviously refer to a number so large that it cannot be described or fully comprehended. The crowd of heavenly creatures was vast beyond belief. The earlier parts of this vision were concentrated closely around the throne. But now the scene of worship is expanded farther than the eye can see or the mind can imagine of heavenly angels worshipping the Lamb. The idea of a numberless multitude serving God is seen throughout Scripture (see Deut. 33:2, Psa. 68:17, Dan. 7:10, Heb. 12:22) and comes to its climax in Revelation (see 7:9, 19:6).

b Proclaiming the Lamb is worthy (12)

This verse gives the content of the sound of the numberless crowd of angels described in the previous verse.

1) Saying with a loud voice (12a)

In one sense, this proposition is just a discourse formula, emphasizing the content that will be listed in the following propositions. But this also stressed that what was said was proclaimed/sang/shouted with a loud voice. Just like in v. 2, the strong angel proclaimed in a loud voice so that all the universe could hear the challenge to open the scroll, so now, all of heaven praises in a loud voice so that all the universe could hear that the Lamb has been found worthy to open the scroll.

2) The slaughtered Lamb is worthy to receive praise(12b-c)

a) The slaughtered Lamb is worthy (12b)

In this proposition, two things are said about the Lamb: 1) that He was slaughtered, and 2) that He is worthy. On "slaughtered," see the comments on 6c and 9f. On "worthy" see the comments on 2c and 9c, as well as 4:11.

b) To receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing (12c)

This verse echoes 4:11, where the One sitting on the throne was praised with similar language. Here, the Lamb also is worthy to receive – not that His creatures can give Him something that He does not already have. Rather, these things about the Lamb are recognized, acknowledged, and rendered back to Him, which are already His (see v. 11, 7:12, 19:1, 1 Chron. 29:11, 1 Tim. 1:17).

And there are seven attributes listed that the Lamb is worthy to receive. The number seven typically represents fullness, completeness, and perfection. So, it may here signify that the Lamb is worthy to receive the perfection and fullness of all praise and blessing and glory, etc.

“Power” means the ability to do something, strength, and capability. This is acknowledging the Lamb’s omnipotence – His unlimited capability and power to do anything He wills to do.

“Riches” could refer to wealth. But it more likely refers to the over-abundance of all the good things that the Lamb is, has, and does. It is all the things which Christ possesses in infinite abundance, which have value far above the idea of worldly wealth (see Phil. 4:19, Eph. 3:8).

“Wisdom” is the ability to understand and act in accordance with that understanding, to bring about the best and desired outcome. It is the capacity to act prudently and therefore to be successful in all things. Christ is the climax of all wisdom (see Col. 2:3).

“Strength” is similar to “power” above. It is the capacity to function effectively, to have might enough to do what is necessary (see 7:12, Job 12:16).

“Honor” is an expression of esteem and reverence as the appropriate response to all that the Lamb is and has done. It is an acknowledgement and celebration of His worthy status and His accomplishments.

“Glory” is a recognition of status and privilege. It is the deserved fame and admiration of which the Lamb is worthy. It is also referring to the inherent glory which the Lamb has because He is God. He is glorious and has infinite splendor.

“Blessing” is to speak about the Lamb in favorable terms. It is not empty flattery, but rather, an accurate celebration of how good and how great the Lamb actually is.

Blessing is to praise the Lamb on account of His blessedness and the blessing He is to all creation.

B. All creation praised God & the Lamb (13)

In verses 11-12, the praise of the Lamb expanded beyond the elders and living creatures to include all of heaven.

In this verse, the praise is further expanded to include all of creation.

1. And I heard all creation which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and upon the sea, and everything in them (13a)

In v. 11, John heard the sound of the heavenly creatures. In this verse, John hears the sound of all of creation. This proposition echoes v. 3, where no one “in heaven or on the earth or under the earth” was found worthy. Now, all creatures included in that same range are responding to the One Who was found worthy. But in this verse, John added everything on the sea and everything which is in all creation (in the heavens, on earth, under the earth, and the sea). This is comprehensive of all creation that exists (see 10:6, 14:7). Nothing is excluded from all creation which John heard giving praise to the Lamb. Just as Paul predicted that every tongue will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord (see Phil. 2:11), so John sees all creation proclaiming His blessedness and glory. At the consummation, all creation will be renewed and transformed, so all creation is part of the worship of the Lamb.

2. Proclaiming the blessing upon God & the Lamb (13b-c)

This section is very similar to v. 12 and 4:11, where the content of the worship is stated. The purpose is not just to inform the reader, but also to impress the reader with the awe of the worship being given to the One on the throne and to the Lamb, and thereby inviting and encouraging the reader to participate in this same kind of worship.

a Saying (13b)

This is a discourse formula, introducing the content of the praise, which is expressed in the next proposition.

b To the One sitting upon the throne and to the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the power, forever and ever (13c)

The content of this worship is directed both to the One sitting upon the throne and to the Lamb. They both together are the objects of worship, which is still more evidence of the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity. The One sitting on the throne and the Lamb are closely connected throughout the rest of the Book of Revelation (see 6:16, 7:10, 17, 22:1, 3).

The “to be” verb in this sentence is implied and assumed, but not explicitly stated (which is the standard syntax in doxologies). Therefore, it could be stating a fact, i.e. “these things are to the One on the throne and the Lamb.” Or it could be stating a prediction, i.e. “these things will be, or should be” But most likely, this is stating a wish/command, i.e. “Let these things be.../May these things be.../Let’s all make these things be...” The underlying idea is that God and the Lamb are worthy of these things, and therefore they should be, and so, we are doing all we can, and calling others to do all they can, to conform to the rightness and appropriateness of rendering the fitting praise and blessing to God and the Lamb.

“Blessing” and “honor” and “glory” are all the same words used in 12c. See the comments there. Notice here that they all equally apply to the One sitting on the throne and to the Lamb (Who is also on the throne). The word “power” is a different word than used in 12c, but it has a very similar meaning. It is power and ability to do whatever is necessary. But this word also has a connotation of power exercised specifically in the activity of ruling and controlling. So, it shades into the meaning of sovereignty and sovereign power to rule. It is the kind of power appropriate for the One ruling on the throne of the universe, and the Lamb Who shares this throne.

And all of these things are to be to God and the Lamb forever and ever. In chapter 4 (see vv. 9-10), it was emphasized that God lives forever. In 1:6, glory and power are to Him forever and ever. Here it is stated that their rule will never end, and this kind of worship will continue for all eternity. And the everlasting nature of God and His rule is yet another ground for heartfelt worship, which we should join.

C. And the four living creatures said “Amen” (14a)

The four living creatures have been mentioned already throughout this vision (see 4:7, 8, 9, 5:6, 8, 11). They have already been described as continually worshipping. In this proposition, they agree with and participate in the worship of all creation which had been described in the previous verses. The word “Amen” is a strong affirmation and agreement with whatever had previously been stated. This word is a stamp of approval that what had been said is true and valid. The living creatures agreed with and thereby participated in the praise and blessing just described.

The worship began in the closest circles around the throne. Then it expanded out to all of heaven and the uncountable multitude of angels. Then it continued to expand to all of creation and all parts of creation. Now the focus is beginning to return back to the center, toward the One sitting on the throne and the Lamb, by moving inward back to the four living creatures, and then (in the rest of this verse) to the 24 elders on the thrones that surround God’s throne.

D. And the elders bowed down and worshipped (14b-c)

This echoes 8b where the living creatures and elders bowed down and worshipped. In this vision they are described as continually doing this. In other words, these descriptions are not of a one-time activity or only an occasional activity of bowing down in worship. Rather, they tell of the constant, consistent activity and attitude of worship around God's throne in heaven for all eternity. This is the fitting and proper response to the greatness, holiness and worthiness of God and the Lamb.

1. And the elders fell down (14b)

The elders threw themselves down as an act of humility, submission, and obeisance. See the comment on 8b. The elders are often described as falling before God in Revelation (see 4:10, 7:11, 11:16, 19:4)

2. And they worshipped (14c)

This is the companion action of the previous proposition. This word means to express both in attitude and bodily posture one's dependence, submission, reverence, and delight in the One that is bowed before. It is the standard New Testament word for worship, and it signifies a prostration of attitude – the attitude that God is infinitely greater than we are – and whatever form of bodily posture and actions most fittingly display that attitude in any particular context.

In Revelation, everything begins at the throne of God, which is situated at the very center of the universe. And everything eventually returns to God's throne in the form of worship and celebration, because He is worthy of all praise, and He (through the Lamb) is bringing His purposes for humanity to their full consummation.

Summary:

The God Who is shown to be holy and sovereign over everything has a scroll containing His purposes and inheritance for all of creation. No one in all of creation is found worthy to open the scroll and complete His purposes. But a savior is revealed, Who is described both as a conquering Lion and as a slaughtered Lamb. This One (representing Christ) is worthy to fulfill God's purposes, because He has died for His people and risen from the grave. This One took the scroll from God's right hand and is in process of bringing God's purposes to consummation. Because He shares the throne with God Himself, and because He has already been victorious in the cross and resurrection, He will certainly succeed in bringing about the consummation of the Kingdom, even if His people live in the tension (which may include persecution and martyrdom in the meantime). Christ has overcome, and has set in motion the consummation of the Kingdom. And for this He is worshipped by all of heaven and all of creation. This is the true reality of human history. Christ is King and is bringing it all to its proper goal. Human kings and rulers pretending to have all control are not reality. They are only pretenders under the ultimate authority of the King of all Kings and Lord of all Lords, Who will bring His people to their destiny. So, His people, no matter how difficult it may be in the meantime, can trust Him and count on this true picture of Who is really ruling history. Therefore, we should see everything from this God-centered, heavenly perspective. If something in our experience does not match this reality, it is temporary and ephemeral, and will soon be changed to conform to the heavenly reality. If someone disagrees with or denies this reality and perspective, they are wrong, and will soon be shown to be wrong. This is the right side of history, no matter who claims otherwise.

This passage (including chapter 4) is a key to understanding the rest of the Book of Revelation. Starting in the very next verse in chapter 6, Christ begins to open the seals, which brings about monumental events to bring history to its intended conclusion. This includes pouring out punishment on sinful humanity. It also includes evil fighting back in a last ditch (futile) attempt to resist the sovereignty of the One sitting on the throne and the Lamb, even by persecuting God's people on earth. Evil tries to portray itself as a sovereign authority, even trying to counterfeit the glory and power of God, in order to deceive humanity. But Christ is on the throne, and will continue to expose evil for what it is and eventually return on a white horse to complete the defeat of all evil and to inaugurate a new heavens and new earth without the presence of evil, which is the purpose of all creation, as written in the scroll.

From this passage (including chapter 4), we learn some key things about the Triune God and our relation to Him: He is great and holy beyond description. He is not described, because He cannot be fully described in finite human language. He is self-existent, and depends on nothing in all of creation. He has life in Himself. And we are dependent on Him. God created everything. He is the creator and reason for everything. Therefore, all of creation is in debt to Him for its

very existence, and finds its true meaning only in Him. God is Lord of history, writing the scroll of universal history, and being the only One Who is worthy to open the scroll. And therefore, our history only has meaning and purpose when we live according to God's meaning and purpose, which He has given us. History is not about us, because it is bigger than us. But we can find significance when we find our place in God's story. God is a gracious redeemer. He is a powerful, victorious Lion, but He is also the lamb Who gave Himself as a sacrifice to purchase our pardon. Therefore, we are debtors to God, not only for our creation, but also for our salvation. We are dependent on God, not only for our existence, but also for our redemption. And God has destined us to be a Kingdom and priests, to somehow share in His rule over creation and to enjoy Him forever. We are double dependent debtors with a destiny beyond imagination.