

Receiving the scroll with seven seals

When can this happen?

John's Book of Revelation is divided into two parts according to the verses: "...the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;" (1:19) and the statement, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must be hereafter." (4:1). The first part consists of chapters 2 and 3, which are letters to the seven churches. They describe the condition and evaluation of the seven churches in the region then known as Asia¹, offering encouragement and warnings to some of them. From the content of the entire first chapter, it can be concluded that what is written in all the letters does not apply only to those seven specific churches, but are pastoral and prophetic texts intended for all Christian churches, valid throughout this age, until the coming of Jesus Christ. It is not out of the question that a similar address to the churches will occur even before the coming of our Lord (Rev. 10:1–4).

The second part of Revelation begins with two chapters describing two significant events taking place in heaven. Chapter 4 describes the glorification of Almighty God on the throne, and Chapter 5 describes the recognition of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Lamb that was slain, Rev. 5:5–6) as worthy to take the scroll with the seven seals from the hand of Almighty God.

¹ Probably derived from the Assyrian word *asu* ("east" or "dawn"), which, from a Mediterranean perspective, referred to the eastern lands. The Greeks originally used this term only for Asia Minor (present-day western Turkey). Over time, the term came to refer to the entire largest and most populous continent.

“ And they sang a new song, saying, You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open the seals thereof: for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation; 10And have made us unto our God a kingdom and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.” (Rev 5:9–10) The only question this brief study will address is: “What must be fulfilled for the Lamb to take the scroll sealed seven times, and when can the Lamb take the scroll?” Why is it good to know this?

It all begins in heaven

Both chapters (4 and 5) describe events in heaven that, as John writes, “will take place later.” One lesson we can learn from the book of Bereishit (In the Beginning)—the Hebrew title of the first book of Moses—is that God does not act randomly, but does everything at the right time. God begins creation by creating the heavens and the earth. He creates everything else on earth in a specific order, at the end of which man is created, for whom everything on earth was created (Gen 1:26–31). King Solomon described this characteristic of creation, in which everything has its time, in the first eight verses of the third chapter of Ecclesiastes. Everything in God’s creation has its order, and the book of Revelation also follows this order. The origin of everything we know is in heaven. It is no wonder that the coming of God’s kingdom also begins in heaven. That is why, at the beginning of what is to come, Jesus introduces us to the events in heaven that directly concern us and the coming of God’s kingdom.

Who is worthy to open that scroll ...?

A mighty angel proclaims, “*Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?*” The word “*proclaims*” is κηρύσσω [kéryssó] and means to proclaim, to announce, to preach; to declare, e.g., Χριστὸς κηρύσσεται ὅτι (1 Cor 15:12) “*it is proclaimed concerning Christ.*” This is not a question, but a

proclamation, a sermon, or an announcement, even though it sounds like a question. The mighty angel proclaims what made John weep. No one is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals. The mighty angel evidently wants to convince the others that no one is worthy to take the scroll and open it. The significance of the scroll is evidenced by the mighty angel's effort to prevent its taking and by John's reaction. For the scroll contains, among other things, the authority to bring the Babylonian era to an end and replace it with God's kingdom. This also means the complete end of God's adversary's rule over people and the entire earth.

The reaction of the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, and the great multitude of angels in heaven clearly indicates that the Lamb, with the scroll in his hands, receives the consent and great authority of all the consenting beings. There is a detail here that shows not everyone agrees, because here, unlike the text of Rev 7:11, where there are "all the angels," there is a great multitude of angels, but not all the angels. This apparent contradiction can be explained by the fact that the Lamb's taking of the scroll and the acknowledgment of his authority by most beings in heaven caused a division among the angels, and those who refused to acknowledge the Lamb are no longer in God's presence around the throne in chapter 7.

Why is the Lamb worthy to take the scroll?

„And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of saints. And they sang a new song,

saying, You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open the seals thereof: for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation; And have made us unto our God a kingdom and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”
Revelation 5,8-10;

The first part of the condition for receiving the scroll was fulfilled by the Lamb as the man Jesus Christ, who voluntarily accepted the sentence of death, allowed himself to be killed by being nailed to a cross, and through his shed blood (John 19:34) redeemed people from every nation, tribe, and language for God. Fulfilling the second condition had to take (and perhaps still takes) much longer. That condition is that He must make (perhaps in the sense of raising up) future kings and priests of God from among the people redeemed from every nation, tribe, people, and language, so that they may reign on earth in God's kingdom. Until all continents and islands have been discovered, and the gospel has been preached to all the people on them, this condition will not be fulfilled. And from among those who accept it, select individuals must be raised up for the role of kings and priests. Whether or not this condition has already been fulfilled, we cannot determine with any certainty. But since some cultures, small tribes, and peoples were still being discovered as late as the mid-20th century, we know for certain that the second condition could not have been fulfilled until at least the second half of the 20th century. Even today, it is not certain that people everywhere have heard the Gospel. For example, in the Amazon or on some rainforest islands, this is not certain.

We won't find out about the Lamb taking the scroll in heaven until ...

Anyone who was expecting some kind of indisputable proof that the Lamb has already taken the scroll with the seals—or, conversely, has not yet taken it—may be a little disappointed. However, God's Word teaches us patience and leads us to watchfulness. That is why God's Word provides us with information on how we will know that the events mentioned in heaven—which are directly related to us and to the coming of God's Kingdom—have taken place. That information is that after the sealed scroll is received, all the seals are broken one by one. With the first seal, a rider on a white horse is summoned by a "thunderous voice." His identity will be easily recognizable to God's watchful servants. Details can be found in the study "[The Rider on the White Horse.](#)" His mission will most likely include a warning against the wrath of God and the Lamb, so that the word describing the events of the sixth seal may be fulfilled (Rev 6:15–17).

Scripture, including prophecy, is governed by the same divine order as all of God's creative work. Just as God created everything in heaven and on earth in a specific order and time, so too do His prophecies have "their own" time and context, which also applies to the prophetic visions of Revelation chapters 4 and 5. We cannot be in heaven to witness the events as they unfold there, so God informs us through His Son and John. This testifies to God's love and justice. Before God's kingdom comes, God wants to ensure that all people—tribes, languages, and nations—have a chance to make a free choice based on true information, so that no one perishes needlessly (2 Peter 3:9).

Let us therefore be patient and watchful, so that we may heed the warning, intended primarily for Christians