

Chapter 5 introduces us to a scroll with seven seals. Opening and unrolling it will spell the end of human history.

But in another sense, the book of Revelation portrays the rolling up of history that has already occurred. Like a scroll, it wraps up in reverse order from its unwinding. J. Edwin Hartill gives this neat summary in *Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics*:

History: God's history of the past.

1. Heavens and earths created.
2. Satan's first rebellion.
3. Earth prepared for man.
4. The headship of the first man.
5. Man's subjection to Satan.
6. Mankind dealt with as a whole.
7. Construction of Babylon.
8. Israel called and blessed.
9. Times of the Gentiles.
10. The first advent of Christ.
11. The ministry of Christ covers life and death.
12. Church called out.

Prophecy: God's Revelation of the future

12. Church called up.
11. The ministry of the AntiChrist.
10. The second advent of Christ.
9. The times of the Gentiles – close of tribulation.
8. Israel recalled and given blessing.
7. Destruction of Babylon.
6. Mankind dealt with as a whole.
5. God's subjection of Satan.
4. The headship of the Second Man (Christ).
3. Earth perfected for man.
2. Satan's final rebellion.
1. The new heavens and new earth.

Notes on Chapter 5

5:1 Unlike most scrolls, this one is written on the front and back. Perhaps one side prophesies the future of Israel, and the other side the Gentiles.

5:2 One commentator says that angels are more strong than intelligent – a Christian knows things into which an angel can only “long to look” (1 Peter 1:12). Interesting thought.

5:4 Why does the prophet weep so bitterly that the scroll cannot be opened? Perhaps it is the universal human longing for final justice to be accomplished.

5:5-6 One of the elders (able to answer the question the angel cannot) announces the presence of the lion of Judah. Here before the throne of God a lion must be a terrifying prospect: A king of beasts, a conqueror, fierce in nature, a judge against whom the sinner knows he has committed offenses.

But what does John actually see? A lamb, the mildest of animals. What's more, the lamb shows it has been slain. Those wounds are the assurance to the believer that the sacrifice has canceled his offense. Instead of a “fearful expectation of judgment” (Heb. 10:27), he is “blessed in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6), through the blood of Christ. What profound joy to see justice and mercy unite, the lion lie down with the lamb!

5:5 Jesus is the descendant of David but also the root of David, his creator and progenitor, the wellspring of David's heart for God.

5:6 Again, seven is the number of perfection and completeness. Seven horns symbolize omnipotence, or complete power. The seven eyes speak of omniscience, perfect knowledge.

5:7 How appropriate that the Lamb is the one to take the scroll to open its seals. The Lord Jesus is always the key to understanding God's mind and purposes.

5:8 The figure of harpists singing a new song is repeated later in Revelation 14. The prayers in the bowls of incense may be the “sacrifice of praise” of Hebrews 13, the pleasing aroma of the New Testament. “*But thanks be to God, who in Christ*

always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere” (2 Cor 2:14).

5:9 The songs of praise we sing to the Lord on earth will have new force in heaven. Here the song extols Christ's worthiness for what He has *done*, when He suffered to redeem a people for His possession.

The phrase “kingdom and priests” in reference to all believers is further evidence that the twenty-four elders represent the church, newly arrived in the heavenly realms and bursting with fresh praise.

5:11 Here the angels join the song, proclaiming what Christ is worthy to *receive*: power and lordship over our existence, our wealth, our measure of strength and wisdom to be devoted to His service, a constant desire to honor and glorify Him in our ways, and all the praise in our hearts.

5:12 This unanimous burst of praise is reminiscent of Philippians 2:10-11: “*... at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*” It seems this must occur after the tribulation when all souls, believer and unbeliever alike, have been raised for blessing or judgment. By no means does the book of Revelation adhere to strict chronological order.