

***GOD CARRIES OUT HIS ETERNAL PLAN
THROUGH THE LAMB***

Revelation chapter 4 and chapter 5 belong together

PART 5. THE SEVEN SEALED SCROLL (5:1-4)

PART 6. THE TRIUMPH OF THE LAMB (5:5-7)

PART 7. WORSHIP IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH (5:8-14)

Revelation 5:1 is the beginning of ‘the last things’ or the beginning of ‘the end of the ages’ (5:1 to 6:17). Revelation chapter 5 describes the enthronement of Jesus Christ after his completed work of salvation at his first coming. He alone has triumphed¹ once for all (5:5). He alone has come to stand² in the centre of God’s throne (5:6). He has all power in heaven and on earth (seven horns) (Matthew 28:18) (5:6). He sees and knows everything and acts through his Spirit everywhere on earth (seven eyes) (Hebrews 4:13) (5:6). He alone receives the authority to reveal and execute God’s eternal plan about the salvation and judgement of people and creation (5:7). All prayers of the saints are presented to him (5:8). He has purchased with his blood people from every language and nation for God (5:9). He inaugurated his kingdom (5:10). And he alone receives the same worship and praise as God of everyone in heaven (5:11-12). The whole universe praises God and the Lamb because of their work of creation and salvation (5:13-14).

PART 5. THE SEVEN SEALED SCROLL (5:1-4)

a. Explanation of the symbols

5:1 “Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne”. John did not see God, but he saw his right hand. The vision speaks of God’s rule of the world.

“a scroll with writing on both sides.”³ See ‘the scroll’ in the introduction to chapter 5. The scroll with writing on both sides contains *God’s decisions with regard to the history of the world and the history of the Church within the world. It contains the unsearchable plan or purpose of God that becomes past, present and future historical events in the salvation history of the whole New Testament period. These great and all-determining historical events that announce the coming of the kingdom of God in its final phase are apocalyptic (grand and violent) events, because they reveal and execute God’s eternal plan of salvation for some and judgement for others.*

Chapter 6 shows that the breaking of the seals not only reveals the contents, but actually executes the contents. And the contents are the main things happening in the history of salvation and judgement: The gospel is proclaimed and people are saved (6:1-2). The Christians are religiously persecuted and economically oppressed (6:3-6). Not only Christians, but also non-Christians are effected by the contents of the scroll: they die due to wars, famine, sicknesses and violent attacks (6:7-8). Christian martyrs must wait for God’s revenge on their enemies (6:9-11). The history of this world will come to a definite end with the final judgement (6:12-17). Nevertheless there are reasons for the delay in bringing God’s history to its planned end (8:1-5).

God, who sits on his throne in the centre of the universe, carries out his eternal plan for this earth and its people *through the Mediator Jesus Christ*. Jesus Christ reveals and executes God’s eternal plan of salvation and judgement. The BOOK in heaven is not in a book form, but in a scroll form. It is rolled up and sealed with seven seals (6:14). It is written ‘within and on the reverse side’, symbolising its immense contents. God’s decree (decisions, plan) with regard to ruling history in this world is rich and varied.

¹ ενικησεν (viaa)

² εστηκος (vpra)

³ βιβλιον γεγραμμενον < γραφω (vprp) εσωθεν και οπισθεν

“and sealed with seven seals.”⁴ If the seven seals were all in one row at the end of the document, they all needed to be broken at one time in order to open the scroll. So the seals were probably arranged in a row on the outside on one end of the scroll. Each seal sealed a part of the scroll, so that opening it enabled one to read that part of the scroll. The word ‘seal’ points to something hidden under what has been sealed. Only someone who is authorised may open the seal, read its contents and execute its contents! The closed and sealed scroll indicates that God’s decree with regard to his rule of this world had at that time not been revealed and had not been executed!

The importance of the seven letters and the scroll with seven seals. The seven letters written to the seven congregations (chapters 2 and 3) contain Christ’s messages concerning how the Church should live in the world. The scroll with its seven seals (5:1) contains God’s decree concerning the *world history* in which the Church lives and serves. The contents of the scroll are revealed in the book of Revelation and are intended for God’s servants⁵, that is, all Christians (1:1; 2:20; 6:11; 7:3; 22:4). Christians must know the responsibilities that Christ (the Head of the Church) gave them with respect to the Church (the seven letters). And they must know the setting of world history that God (the One on the throne ruling the universe) has decreed for them with respect to living and serving in the world (the scroll with its seven seals).

The opening of the scroll. When the Lamb opens a seal, things happen! By opening the seals of the scroll, he not only *reveals* its contents and the significance of its contents, but *executes* the contents! By breaking the seals the Lamb realises its contents! The one opening the seals is the One through whom God rules world history, even the whole universe (cf. 6:12-14; Ephesians 1:9-10,20-22). By opening all seven seals, Christ reveals and executes God’s plan with regard to salvation and judgment perfectly and completely. It symbolises Christ ruling over the whole universe in the interest of the Church (Ephesians 1:20-23). As long as the scroll remains sealed, its contents remain undisclosed and not carried out. If the scroll would remain sealed, there would be no protection for Christians, no judgments that fall on the evil world that persecutes Christians, no victories for Christians in their struggles and no new heaven and new earth!

The contents of the scroll. The scroll and its contents is a symbol for God’s eternal and all-comprehensive *plan or decree* concerning everything that must happen, not only during the end-time, but *during all future time from Christ’s first coming to Christ’s second coming in world history and in the eternal state that follows world history.* It contains everything revealed in the book of Revelation from chapter 6 onwards. It is God’s plan for the government of the Church and the world. It describes the most important events in God’s history of salvation and the history of the world. It contains God’s purpose with respect to the Church and the entire universe throughout world history, and concerning all creatures in all ages and into all eternity. Hence it is full of writing on both sides!

5:2 “And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice”. The angel was strong enough to be heard in the whole universe. No one could later claim that he did not hear. No one will have an excuse (Romans 3:19).

“Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” Who in the whole universe is worthy to reveal and execute God’s eternal decree concerning everything that must happen?

5:3 “But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it”. The expression in heaven, on earth and under the earth (Exodus 20:4) is based upon the ancient, Oriental conception of the universe and we must take it in its entirety as representing the entire universe. No angel, no demon, no man whether political leader or religious prophet and no creature in the whole universe was found worthy. No *creature* (created being) is worthy and therefore authorised to reveal and execute its contents. The Lamb who opened the scroll was not a created being. He is eternal!

5:4 “I wept and wept, because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.”⁶ John weeps because he understands the significance of opening the scroll, that is, of revealing and executing its contents. John understands that if the scroll is not opened, the world history cannot develop and the kingdom of God and the eternal state cannot be realised. If the scroll is not opened, then there is no protection for

⁴ κατεσφραγισμενον < κατασφραγιζω (vpp) σφραγισιν επτα

⁵ δουλοι

⁶ και εκλαιον (viii) πολυ οτι ουδεις αξιος ευρεθη (viap) ανοιξαι (vnaa) το βιβλιον ουτε βλεπειν (vnpa) αυτο

God's people (the Church) in the hours of bitter persecutions and trials. Then there are no judgements upon a wicked and persecuting world. Then there is no triumph for Christians. Then there will be no new heaven and new earth. Then there will be no future inheritance. In short there will be no hope at all! *Whoever views this world and the history of the world without the God who revealed himself in the Bible remains without hope (Ephesians 2:12) and without peace (Isaiah 57:20-21; Isaiah chapter 59)!*

However, when the seals of the scroll are broken, then God's sovereign rule in the universe and in history is realised and the universe is governed in the interest of the Church (Ephesians 2:22). Then God's glorious purpose for salvation and judgement is being realised. Then the contents of the scroll come to pass in the history of the universe.

b. Different views about the scroll sealed with seven seals (5:1)

There are three views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The first futurist view) The scroll with seven seals is the title deed to the throne of David, to the land of Palestine and to the inheritance of the whole earth. This title deed is given to Christ only after the Church has been removed from the earth (the rapture).⁷

Second view. (The second futurist view) Tenney cannot choose between the premillennial and the inaugurated millennial views. Like the first view - the scroll with seven seals is God's will or testament, which could only be opened by the heir and executor of the estate.⁸

But also like the correct view - the scroll with seven seals represents the mystery of God's purpose for the world. The scroll with seven seals expresses the historical *principles or trends* that bring judgement upon the world.⁹

Third view. (The correct explanation) The scroll with seven seals and its contents is a symbol for God's sovereign rule over the universe and history and contains God's eternal and all-comprehensive *plan or decree* concerning everything that must happen, not only during the end-time, but *during all future time from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming in world history and in the eternal state that follows world history.*¹⁰

PART 6. THE TRIUMPH OF THE LAMB (5:5-7)

a. Explanation of the symbols

5:5 "Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep!' " Not an angel, but an elder (a representative of the Church in heaven) explains (cf. 7:13), because the explanation concerns Christ and his redemption of the Church. The scroll does not simply contain God's decree concerning the world and its history, but God's decree concerning the whole universe and its history, which includes his decree concerning the salvation of his people (the Church) and his decree concerning the judgement of his enemies.

"See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals"¹¹. The lion is a symbol of royalty. The Lion of the tribe of Judah is an indication of the coming Messiah King (Genesis 49:9-10). The Root of David (cf. 22:6) refers to Christ's *human nature* as being the descendent of David (2 Samuel 7:12 ff.; Psalm 89:28,35,36; Jeremiah 23:5; Matthew 1:17; Luke 3:31; Acts 2:30) and at the same time to Christ's *divine nature* as the Creator of David. The symbol points to Christ's humble origin (Isaiah 11:1,10) and Davidic kingship, but more to the fact that he is David's Origin and David's Lord (Matthew 22:41-45)!

Only Jesus Christ has triumphed. No one else, whether political leader or religious prophet, has triumphed! Therefore only Jesus Christ is worthy to be the Mediator of God's eternal plan in creation and in history. At his first coming Jesus Christ has conquered *sin* on the cross (Romans 6:6-7), conquered the *world* (John

⁷ Larkin, Revelation pp. 44-45.

⁸ Tenney, p. 191

⁹ Tenney, p. 126

¹⁰ Greijdanus pp.104-105, Hendriksen pp. 108-110

¹¹ ἰδοὺ ἐνίκησεν (vīaa) ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰουδα, ἡ ρίζα Δαυὶδ, ἀνοίξει (vnaa) τὸ βιβλίον καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ

16:33), conquered *Satan* through his life (1 John 3:8) and death (Colossians 2:15), and conquered *spiritual death* (Ephesians 2:5) and *physical death* by his resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:54). Because he has conquered, he has the right to open the scroll and break the seals, that is, to rule the universe in accordance with God's plan (Ephesians 1:20-23; Philippians 2:9-11). By conquering, he has earned the right to open the sealed scroll and to reveal and to execute its contents, that is, he has been given all authority in heaven and on earth to rule the universe in accordance with God's eternal decree (Matthew 28:18-20) and in the interest of the Church (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Chapter 6 shows that when Christ breaks a seal, he not only reveals its contents, but actually *executes* the contents. The rider on the white horse actually conquers; the rider on the fiery red horse actually takes peace from the earth; the rider on the black horse actually causes economic oppression; and the rider on the pale horse actually kills by the sword, famine, plague and wild beasts.

5:6 “Then I saw a Lamb looking as if it had been slain (slaughtered), standing in the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.”¹² One would expect to see a *lion*, but instead John sees a *lamb*. In his vision John had not previously seen the Lamb. Christ in his suffering and death showed the characteristics of both a lion (courage and strength) and a lamb (self-sacrifice, meekness and tenderness) (Isaiah 53:5-7).

After his death (described as a slaughtering) and resurrection and ascension to heaven, the Lamb stands in the centre of the throne. He stands, because he is pictured before he ascends to sit on the throne at the right hand of God! He still carries the marks of the cross visibly (John 1:29,36; Acts 8:32; 1 Peter 1:19). This means that his death representing his completed work of salvation has abiding value!

“He had seven horns.”¹³ A horn symbolises authority, power and dominion (17:12; Deuteronomy 33:17; 1 Samuel 2:10; Psalm 75:10). Christ's seven horns symbolise his divinely complete and perfect dominion, his strength and might to reveal and execute God's eternal decree: his omnipotence!

“and seven eyes which are the seven spirits (the sevenfold Spirit) of God sent out into all the earth.”¹⁴

Christ's seven eyes symbolise his divinely complete and perfect knowledge, his omniscience! He sees everything everywhere and at all times. He knows everything about everyone. Christ's seven eyes also represent 'the seven spirits'. The sevenfold Spirit refers to Isaiah 11:2, where the Messiah possesses seven characteristics of the Spirit, which are: the Spirit of the LORD, of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of power (might), of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. This means that Christ is *equipped with the absolute fullness of the Holy Spirit's power, gifts and wisdom* (Isaiah 11:2). See also Revelation 1:4 (3:1; cf. Romans 8:9-10).

God's sevenfold Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:2,6,10; cf. 2 Chronicles 16:9) or Christ's sevenfold Holy Spirit ranges throughout the earth. This means that Christ's Spirit is *active in the whole world* and makes the whole world Christ's kingdom (John 16:13-15)! And Christ's Spirit is present and active in all the congregations in the world (2:7).

5:7 “He came once for all time and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne and now holds the scroll.”¹⁵ Taking and receiving the scroll signifies that Christ has received the authority to rule the universe according to God's eternal decree. This event symbolises the coronation and enthronement of Jesus Christ at his first coming! This event has already taken place! Christ is now the Lord and King (1:5; 17:14; 19:16; cf. Matthew 12:28; 28:18)! Breaking the seals and opening the scroll signifies that Christ has revealed its contents and is at present continuing to execute its contents (chapter 6)! Christ is at present the King putting all his enemies under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:25).

In his first sermon, the apostle Peter clearly teaches that Jesus Christ occupied the throne of David (Acts 2:30) and of the universe (Acts 2:35-36) at the time of his resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of God the Father at his first coming (Acts 2:30-36). And the writer to the Hebrews says that after Christ had been made lower than the angels (during his incarnation) he was crowned with glory and honour (at his

¹² Και ειδον εν μεσω του θρονου και των τεσσαρων ζωνων και εν μεσω των πρεσβυτερων αρνιον εστηκος (vpra) ως εσφαγμενον (vprp)

¹³ εχων (vpra) κερατα επτα

¹⁴ και οφθαλμους επτα, οι εισιν (vira) τα [επτα] πνευματα του θεου απεσταλμενοι (vprp) εις πασαν την γην

¹⁵ και ηλθεν (viaa) και ειληφεν λαμβανω (vira) εκ της δεξιας του καθημενου επι του θρονου.

The perfect tense emphasises the continued result of the action.

resurrection, ascension and enthronement) (Hebrews 2:9). Thus, Jesus Christ inaugurated his kingdom on earth (Matthew 12:28-29) and in the universe (Matthew 28:18) at his first coming!

Christ received the kingdom, that is, the kingship on earth and in the universe as a reward for his redemptive work (to save people by his sacrifice of atonement). The kingdom was predicted during the Old Testament period (Psalm 2; Psalm 110; Daniel 7:9-14) and this prophecy was fulfilled at Christ's first coming (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20-23; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 2:7-9). The Messiah's coronation, his investiture with the office of King over the universe (1:5; 17:14; 19:16) is a very significant moment in the history of the universe! By giving the scroll to Christ, the throne occupant (God) did not abdicate the throne. Instead, Christ was seated upon the throne together with God the Father (Acts 2:35). From this moment onwards, the throne is "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:1)! God did not let go of the government of the universe and the rule of the world (Psalm 9:7; 145:13; 146:10), but governs the universe *through* the Lamb as Mediator. Jesus Christ rules the world according to God's plan and in God's power (John 5:19,30).¹⁶

From this moment, that is, from the first coming of Christ, there is the beginning of a new era on earth and a new era in heaven. Satan is bound on earth (20:1-3; Matthew 12:28-29) and Christians who die reign with Christ in heaven (20:4-6; 3:21; cf. Philippians 1:23). During the first coming of Christ the prince of this world was driven out. His power and influence in the world was curbed, curtailed, restrained, limited (John 12:31-32). With the enthronement of Christ in heaven the reign of Christians together with Christ in heaven became the new reality (Ephesians 1:20-23; 2:6)!

b. Different views about the Lamb (5:6)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The Lamb with the seven horns standing before the throne is Jesus Christ who *in the future immediately after the removal of the Church from the earth (the rapture)* would get up from sitting at the right hand of God on the throne and receive from God the authority to dispossess Satan and reclaim the lost inheritance of the earth, the land of Israel and the throne of David during the future tribulation period.

Second view. (The correct explanation) The Lamb with the seven horns standing before the throne is a symbol of Jesus Christ immediately *after his completed work of salvation on earth* (his death, resurrection and ascension) and receiving from God the authority to rule as King over the universe and earth, revealing and executing God's eternal decree for everything that should happen.¹⁷

PART 7. WORSHIP IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH (5:8-14)

a. Explanation of the symbols

5:8 "And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb."¹⁸ When the Lamb had taken the scroll he accepted the office of King of the universe. Immediately there was a great burst of triumph and exuberant joy in the following three doxologies.

"Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints"¹⁹. Each of them (most probably the elders) has a harp (lyre, citer?), an instrument to honour and praise God with joy and shouting (14:2; 15:2) and of joyful music (18:22).

Once more a symbol is clearly explained in the book of Revelation. These are symbols of the prayers of the saints, that is, of Christians who were purchased by the blood of the Lamb. Prayers like incense rise before God (Psalm 141:2). The content of these prayers is worship, praise and thanks in its most comprehensive sense. The ministry of the elders is mentioned: they hold these bowls of prayers and it is assumed here that they pour these prayers out before God's throne, a symbolic action representing the fact that God genuinely hears and answers the prayers of his saints (8:3-5). This also shows the representative character of the twenty-four elders. They are not identical with the saints, but represent the saints in heaven. They are not

¹⁶ Greijdanus pp. 107-108, Hendriksen pp.110-111

¹⁷ Hendriksen pp. 110-111

¹⁸ και οτε ελαβεν (viaa) το βιβλιον, τα τεσσαρα ζωα και οι εικοσι τεσσαρες πρεσβυτροι επεσαν (viaa) ενωπιον του αρνιου

¹⁹ εχοντες εκαστος κιθαραν και φιαλας χρυσαα γεμουσαα (vnpa) θυμιαματων, αι εισιν (vnpa) προσευχαι των αγιων

mediators of the saints on earth, because only Christ is the Mediator (1 John 2:1-2). They also do not pray on behalf of the saints on earth, because only Christ and his Spirit does that (Romans 8:26-27,34). They only pour out before the throne the prayers of the saints on earth. The prayers of the saints are mixed with incense of the altar (8:3) that represents the prayers of Christ based on his completed sacrifice of atonement.

5:9 “And they sang a new song.”²⁰ See ‘a new song’ in the introduction to chapter 5. The twenty-four elders sing this new song about Christ’s completed work of salvation. This song was never heard before, but now that Christ has been enthroned at the right hand of God, he is praised as such! It is new because never before had such a great deliverance been accomplished and never before had the Lamb received this great honour. It is a song of redemption. The word ‘new’ is associated with the renewal of people in regeneration (2 Corinthians 5:17) and with the new things in Revelation: the new name (2:17; 3:12), the New Jerusalem (3:12; 21:2) and the new heaven and new earth (21:1). Because God is making all things new (21:5) in and through Christ, this new song is sung!

“‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals.’”²¹ God did not simply make any decree. He based his eternal decree indissolubly on the completed work of salvation of the Lamb, his death and resurrection! The act of receiving the scroll and breaking its seals means that the Lamb will read its contents, reveal it and carry it out! Due to the fall the whole creation and history of man deserves to be cast into eternal chaos and corruption. However, only because of the completed salvation work of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the history of the world (Genesis 3:15; 12:3; Colossians 1:16-17), the history of God’s Old Testament people in retrospect (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53) and the history of God’s New Testament people (Colossians 1:18) can happen and will happen! The opening of the seals determines the existence of the whole universe, the development of the whole human race and the whole history of the world right up to the point world history ends and eternal history begins. That is why the Lamb continues to carry the recognisable marks of the cross (5:6,9)! Therefore he is praised by everyone in heaven!

Christ is worthy to be praised because of his completed work of salvation. The song emphasises Christ’s redemptive work, his suffering and death, the universality of his salvation and the kingdom or Church and its glorious position and task.

“‘because you were *once for all time* slain and with your blood you *once for all time* purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.’”²² Jesus Christ was once in history (at his first coming) slaughtered and by his blood (his atoning sacrifice) he once for all purchased people for God. His work of salvation was absolutely unique. No one else accomplished this or would be able to accomplish this.

The word ‘purchase’ is a figure of speech meaning ‘to acquire as property’. Believers are the property of Christ, because he figuratively bought them with his blood (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). The emphasis is on the unimaginable large price it cost to acquire people to belong to God.

Christ did not purchase every single individual, but paid the price for his uncountable number of elect, that is, for people *out of* every tribe, language, people and nation in the world. The Bible does not teach universal atonement of sins. The people from all tribes, languages, peoples and nations include those who believed in the coming of Christ during the Old Testament period or believed in Christ that had come during the New Testament period. There is absolutely no biblical warrant to exclude Israel from the nations that are mentioned here. This is no longer the Old Testament perspective of God’s people oppressed by the nations (the ‘nations’ was then a symbol of the oppressors of God’s people), but the New Testament perspective in which there is no longer any difference between the Jewish nation and the Gentile nations (John 10:16; Romans 10:12; Colossians 3:11). The redeemed people come out of the whole of mankind according to its divisions: ‘Tribe’ means descent, origin, family relationship, blood relationship. ‘Language’ means unity of thought and world view, unity in the existence of the soul. ‘People’ means political unity under the same government. And ‘nation’ means unity of life style, morals and culture. Christ’s salvation is world-wide in its scope and embraces every group of people. These distinctions among people will exist till the end-time, but from each of these human divisions God will gather his Church (7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6).

²⁰ και αδοουσιν (vīpa) ωδην καινην λεγοντες (vppa),

²¹ Αξιός ει (vīpa) λαβειν (vnaa) το βιβλιον και ανοιξει (vnaa) τας σφραγιδας αυτου

²² οτι εσφραγης (vīap) και αγορασας (vīaa) τω θεω εν τω αιματι σου εκ πασης φυλης και γλωσσης και λαου και εθνους

5:10 “You have made *them* to be a kingdom and priests for our God and they will reign on the earth.”²³ By his completed work of salvation, Christ has made all those whom he purchased with his blood into a kingdom and into priests. The kingdom which had come at his first coming (Mark 1:15), was established by his preaching (Matthew 4:23; 13:11; see all the parables), by his driving out of demons (Matthew 12:28-29) and by his death and resurrection (1:5-6; 5:10). Christians enter the kingdom and are part of that kingdom the very moment they are born again (John 3:3-8; Colossians 1:13). The kingdom is a present reality on this earth, because one can only enter a kingdom that already exists. The kingdom does not refer to a so-called future millennial kingdom. Through Christ’s completed work of salvation, Christians have become the kingdom of God!

The kingdom of God is the sovereign kingship or rule of God in the hearts and lives of people, based on Christ’s completed work of salvation and the application of that salvation by the Holy Spirit. The kingdom results in their complete salvation from beginning to end, their establishment as a Church, their influence in the world and finally in the renewed universe. See kingdom in supplement 1.

Through Christ’s completed salvation work, all Christians are priests with priestly duties (1 Peter 2:4-10). By means of the incense of their prayers, the saints on earth already now effect what happens on earth (8:3-5)! But their reign will be realised in all its fullness only in heaven (20:6) and on the new earth (22:5).

5:11 “Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.”²⁴ John sees and hears things in his visions. The song of the elders (as the heavenly representatives of the Church) is echoed by the angels in heaven. The elders sing first because they represent the Church that has first experienced this salvation. Then the angels sing because they have been instructed in the mysteries of redemption by the elders (1 Peter 1:12; Ephesians 3:10). The number of angels is very large and not exactly defined. It is an apocalyptic number meaning countless thousands. Their number is great in spite of the angels who fell together with Satan. Their position is in a concentric circle around the twenty-four elders.

In Revelation chapter 4 and 5 John describes what he sees in his vision of heaven. He sees the throne and its Occupant encircled by seven concentric circles. See the introduction to chapter 4. The throne Occupant (God the Father) shares his throne with God the Son (5:6) and God the Spirit (4:2,5).

5:12 “In a loud voice they sang: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise.’”²⁵ These seven excellent characteristics represent all the virtues in heaven and on earth (5:12; 7:12). God has entrusted everything in the universe into Christ’s hands. Christ is endowed with the highest possible endowments to carry out God’s decree.

His power is revealed in his conquering sin, the world, death and Satan (Philippians 3:10,21).

His wealth is what he gave up to make Christians rich (2 Corinthians 8:9) and the boundless abundance of what he possesses in the universe after his accomplished work of salvation.

His wisdom is revealed in the plan of salvation, which no wise man could have thought out (1 Corinthians 1:22-24). God always employs the best means to reach the highest goal. This wisdom also implies the reconciliation of seeming incompatibilities (cf. Ephesians 3:10). For example: the Lord is able to use wicked people to attain his own good ends (Proverbs 16:4). He uses the foolishness of God to confound the wisdom of the world and the weakness of God to overcome the strength of man (1 Corinthians 1:25). God’s secret wisdom employs the death of Christ to give eternal life to believers (1 Corinthians 2:7-9). God made Christ to be sin so that believers may become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ redeems believers from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for them in order that the blessing given to Abraham (the covenant) might come to the Gentiles through Christ (Galatians 2:13-14).

²³ και ποιησας (v1aa) αυτους τω θεω ημων βασιλειαν και ιερεις και βασιλευσουσιν (v1fa) επι της γης

²⁴ Και ειδον (v1aa), και ηκουσα (v1aa) φωνην αγγελων πολλων κυκλω του θρονου και των ζωνων και των πρεσβυτερων, και ην (v1aa) ο αριθμος αυτων μυριαδες μυριαδων και χιλιαδες χιλιαδων

²⁵ λεγοντες (v1pa) φωνη μεγαλη, Αξιον εστιν (v1fa) το αρνιον το εσφαγμενον (v1rp) λαβειν (v1aa) την δυναμιν και πλουτον και σοφιαν και ισχυν και τιμην και δοξαν και ευλογιαν

His strength is revealed in actually executing the plan of salvation, robbing Satan of his arrogant and false claim (Luke 11:22).

His honour is expressed when Christians and angels recognise his power in salvation and judgement and submit to it (Philippians 2:9-11).

His glory results when the splendour of God's attributes is recognised. For example, his glory is expressed in the truth he proclaims and the grace he gives (John 1:14).

His praise is the one gift that we who have nothing can give to him who possesses all!

The angels do not call these things down as a blessing on Christ, but acknowledge and praise Christ for being the Possessor of all these things! God is praised for who he is in Revelation 4:11. Christ is praised for what he has accomplished in Revelation 5:9-10. And both God and Christ are praised for who they are in Revelation 5:11-14. Thus, Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15; John 14:9)!

5:13 "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be the praise and the honour and the glory and the power for ever and ever!'"²⁶ The definite article is used with all these attributes, indicating that these attributes surpass everything. No-one and nothing can withstand them.

The song of the representatives of the Church (the elders) and the angels in heaven is taken over by creation in all its parts, by all creatures in the universe. They praise God, from whom, through whom and to whom is everything (Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 8:6). And they praise the Lamb.

In Revelation chapter 4 the message is, 'God sits on the throne of the universe'.

In Revelation chapter 5 the message is, 'God and the Christ sit on the throne and God rules through Christ'.

Jesus Christ is not only the Mediator in creation (John 1:3) and the Mediator in salvation (1 Timothy 2:5-6), but also the Mediator in ruling the universe!

5:14 "The four living creatures said, 'Amen,' and the elders fell down and worshipped."²⁷ It is possible to view the four living creatures to be representatives of all God's creatures in the universe (heaven and earth), just as the twenty-four elders are representatives of all God's redeemed people on earth. Both enhance God's throne by praising God as Creator (4:11) and Redeemer (5:9).

b. Different views about the kingdom and priests (5:10)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The elders are identical to God's redeemed people (the Church). The elders will only be made a kingdom and priests after the Church has been removed from the earth (the rapture). The elders belong to the heavenly kingdom. *On earth there is no kingdom, until the future millennial kingdom would be established.*

Second view. (The correct explanation) The elders are heavenly beings that represent the Church directly in heaven with God *throughout the whole New Testament period*. The elders proclaim that God's redeemed people (the Church) have already been made a kingdom and priests at Christ's first coming.

Christians on earth belong to this kingdom, which *is already a present reality on earth from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming!*

²⁶ και παν κτισμα ο εν τω ουρανω και επι της γης και υποκατω της γης και επι της θαλασσης, και τα εν αυτοις παντα, ηκουσα > ακουω (viaa) λεγοντας (vrrpa), τω καθημενω επι τω θρονω και τω αρνω η ευλογια και η τιμη και η δοξα και το κρατος εις τους αιωνας των αιωνων

²⁷ και τα τεσσαρα ζωα ελεγον (viiia), Αμην. και οι πρεσβυτεροι επεσαν (viaa) και προσεκυνησαν (viaa)