

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Lecture 9, Revelation 4 and 5

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 9, Revelation 4 and 5 continued.

Out of the different ways we could understand the 24 elders, in my opinion, out of the four options we surveyed, the angelic beings modeled on the 24 courses of priests from 1 Chronicles, the church in heaven raptured away or removed before the events of chapters 4-22, the 24 elders as heavenly representatives of Israel in the church, and the angelic beings who belong to the heavenly court.

Out of these, I find it difficult to pin it down to one precisely. I wonder if probably a combination of number one and number three, perhaps even four, I would find it hard to exclude four, the idea of a heavenly court, especially the connection with that mention of the elders in Isaiah 24-23, but that in any case, these then would be angelic beings who worship God and who function as the heavenly representatives of God's people on earth. Furthermore, another interesting twist to what's going on in chapter four and chapter five as well.

It's interesting that, and this might help us provide also a background for the 24 elders. Interestingly, in some of the images and literature that depict the emperor in the context of the Roman world, the emperor is often described as accompanied by lictors, or the closest thing would be basically bodyguards. So, where the emperor would often go places or be at certain banquets or public events surrounded by lictors or bodyguards.

Interestingly, according to Suetonius, the historian Suetonius, Domitian had 24 lictors that often accompanied him. So, is it that Domitian, often these lictors would follow him or when Domitian presided over games or other events, often he was accompanied by priests who intriguingly were described as wearing golden crowns. In fact, in another literature in Asia Minor, the priest who ran the emperor cult, the priests responsible for the emperor cult are also often depicted as wearing golden crowns.

So, is it possible that John has constructed an image that relates both to the Old Testament background of maybe 24 courses of priests or the heavenly council and angelic beings as the heavenly representatives of God's people? And that, but at the same time, he has used image that reflects what was going on in the Greco-Roman background. So, that God is actually being compared to Domitian, if that is the emperor ruling.

So, in chapter four, again, this is more fuel, adding more fuel to the fire of chapter four being counter-imperial. Although it may be better to say that God is not so much being compared to Domitian as vice versa. Domitian is being compared to God and Domitian's rule is seen to fall short.

God's rule is contested by Caesar. God's rule is contested by Caesar, but Caesar is a poor parody of, or Caesar is a poor imitation of God's rule, which is in conflict with Caesar. Therefore, Caesar can be described in similar ways as God's reign and God's rule.

So, again, John may be deliberately drawing on imagery that is evocative of Jewish background but also evocative of Greco-Roman background to further demonstrate the conflict between God and Caesar and who is in charge, who is truly the ruler of the universe. It's not Caesar who is surrounded by his entourage, but now it is God who is seated on his throne, surrounded by his entourage of angelic beings who worship and acknowledge his sovereignty in direct contrast to Caesar. In fact, intriguingly, without going into all the details, the whole scene of chapters 4 and 5 may, at one level again, although we've seen chapters 4 and 5 appears to be deliberately modeled on the heavenly throne room from Ezekiel 1 and 2 and Isaiah chapter 6. At the same time, chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation may also contrast with known court scenes in the Roman world.

A series of works, starting with a couple of articles and ending with his major commentary in the Word Biblical Commentary series, the first volume that covers chapters 4 and 5. David Aune has argued that much of what one finds in 4 and 5 resembles what we know and what we can know about court scenes in the Roman world, where Aune suggests Caesar would have been seated on his throne. He would have been surrounded by his friends, similar to these lictors or priests. He would have been surrounded by his friends.

His friends and those surrounding him would have shouted words of praise and acclamation to Caesar, who was seated on his throne. And now, in direct parody to that, God is depicted as on his throne, surrounded by his followers or his friends, his court, and they are now shouting words of praise and acclamation to God. So, it is God who is king, and Caesar is not.

So, as I said, it may not be so much that God's throne is a parody of Caesar's as vice versa. Caesar's throne is seen to be a parody, a poor parody, and a deficient one of God's throne. But clearly there is anti-imperial rhetoric, I think, going on here.

John is, as I said, probably drawing in both Old Testament imagery and Greco-Roman imagery to construct a scene of the heavenly throne room where God is seated on his throne and all of the residents of the heavenly court surround God and worship him and acknowledge his sovereignty as the sovereign creator and ruler over the

entire universe. The other feature to draw attention to in relationship to this part of the environs surrounding the throne is this reference to a glassy sea or a sea of glass, starting with verse 4 again, surrounding the throne are four other thrones seated in them 24 elders, and they were dressed in white, had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, etc.

Before the throne were the blazing lamps. These are the seven spirits of God. Also, before the throne was what looked like a sea of glass.

I'm going to skip over the seven spirits. We've already seen that introduced. We said the seven spirits probably represent the seven-fold spirit of God and not seven separate, seven separate spirits, but seven being an image of a symbol of perfection and completeness.

Here is the fullness of God's spirit, the complete spirit of God in connection with the throne of God. But what I want to focus on is actually two features, starting then with this glassy sea. Probably, the sea of glass furthers the temple imagery.

It probably represents the basin or laver in Solomon's temple. But also, it appears that this sea of glass may represent, again, a feature that we find in Ezekiel's description of his throne vision back in Ezekiel chapter 1. In Ezekiel chapter 1 and verse 22, and as we said, John is heavily dependent on Ezekiel chapters 1 and 2, especially for describing what he sees in John's own vision in chapters 4 and 5. But in chapter 1 and verse 22, I'll start with verse 19, when the living creatures moved, it kind of anticipates the next group that we'll look at for living creatures. But when the living creatures moved, the wheels beside them moved, and when the living creatures rose from the ground, the wheels also rose.

But let me skip down then to verse 22; spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice and awesome. So, this vision of an expanse, sparkling, may resemble or may be the impetus for John's glassy sea that he now sees. But again, there's probably no reason to limit it to just one.

Given the temple imagery that one finds, if this throne room scene is God's temple, then the background of the basin in Solomon's temple would certainly provide a fitting background. But since he's drawing on Ezekiel, Ezekiel 1:22, this sparkling expanse may also provide the backdrop for what John sees. A further possible background would be the Red Sea, which I will argue plays a role elsewhere in Revelation.

In fact, this I think becomes more apparent in chapter 15 and verse 2 of Revelation, where, intriguingly, you see the saints standing victorious starting in chapter 15 in heaven. 15 verse 1, I saw in heaven another great marvelous sign, seven angels with

the seven last plagues, alas, because with them God's wrath is completed. Now listen to this, verse 2, and I saw what looked like a sea of glass.

From chapter 4, mixed with fire and standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name, and they held harps given to them by God, and they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God. So, in chapter 15, you have this picture of the saints in a new exodus being delivered from the oppression of evil and from Satan and the beast and the oppressive Roman empire. Now they stand victorious as Moses and the Israelites did by the sea, and they sing the song of Moses as the Israelites did.

So having said that this may also, this glassy sea in chapter 4, may also anticipate the Red Sea, and the point of this is probably, I think, simply this, in Revelation, the sea often is seen, and I think this was true back in the Exodus account as well, the sea is often understood as something that is evil. Later on, a beast will come out of the sea. The sea seems to be the same as the abyss from which demonic beings come, from which evil comes.

The sea is the home of the dead later on in Revelation. So, the sea has all kinds of negative connotations in Revelation, and you can find this in Jewish literature as well. The sea is the home of the sea monster, the beast that comes to oppress God's people.

So, what you find happening in chapter 4 already is the sea of chaos and evil has already been calmed and defeated. So, what have God's people to fear? The sea of evil is already subdued, and it's already calmed. To kind of anticipate, I think not only does this anticipate chapter 15 where the people stand beside the sea, it's been calmed and subdued, but it also anticipates chapter 21 verse 1 where the sea was no more.

That is the sea of evil and chaos has been removed so that God now brings about a new creative act in Revelation chapter 21. So, the idea though is in God's dwelling, in God's temple, all is calm. The sea that will cause problems for God's people in Revelation has already been subdued and already been calmed by God's very presence and by his very sovereignty.

The other feature to briefly draw your attention to is the thunder and lightning that come from the throne in verse 5. From the throne came flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder. Interestingly, another allusion to the Exodus and to Mount Sinai clearly indicates a theophany, clearly also demonstrating that chapter 4 is also a scene of God on his throne, ready to judge. And we'll see again part of what happens starting with chapter 6 is God begins to judge this creation and wicked humanity in establishing his kingdom.

This then provides us with the backdrop for the next group in verses 6-8 and that is the four living creatures. This is apocalyptic symbolism at its best. Again, you have these creatures that have animal features.

They have human features as well. One of them looks like a lion. One looks like an ox.

One looks like a human being. Another looks like a flying eagle. They all have six wings.

They have eyes all over them. They are really strange creatures indeed. Again, this is apocalyptic symbolism at its best.

Clearly, John draws his inspiration from this from Ezekiel chapter 1. We already read about the living creatures in Ezekiel. But also, some of the language of six wings etc. come out of Isaiah chapter 6. So again, John is drawing on his prophetic predecessors to construct a scene to make clear exactly what he saw is in continuity with what other prophets of the past.

Again, he's sort of taking on their mantle. But now John writes in light of the fulfillment of Jesus Christ, who will appear on the scene in chapter 5. What you end up having then, I think, is this picture that John constructs. We said the throne is at the center, and in broadening concentric circles you have the 24 elders next.

Then I think we're to picture the four living creatures outside of them. And the creatures and the elders have the same function. They are to worship God day and night.

They are to offer God ceaseless praise because he is the creator of all things. And because he is the sovereign ruler over all of his creation. Given the background of Ezekiel and Isaiah, we are probably to understand these four living creatures as angelic beings, much like the 24 elders.

And again, the important point I want to stress is it's not so much important to figure out exactly or precisely who they are or to identify them as it is to recognize their function of praise, ceaseless praise, and worship of the one seated on the throne. One of the questions that could be raised is why four? To go back to our discussion of symbolism, we said even the numbers in Revelation are to be taken not for their strict mathematical value or numerical precision but for what they connote symbolically. We saw number four is a number that was symbolic of the entire earth.

It represented the entire earth. So, these four, such as the four corners of the earth, suggesting that these four living creatures are probably heavenly angelic beings that represent all of created order. This is the heavenly counterpart of all of creation, all of animate creation, and all of life now represented by these four living creatures.

And that may be suggested by their identity. The fact that one's a lion, one is a calf, one is a man, and one is an eagle, may again suggest the full spectrum of animate creation. Now that four living creatures are representative of that offering up the ceaseless praise, that interestingly, again, is an anticipation of the universal praise and worship that eventually will transpire on this present earth.

A present earth that now at this time contests God's sovereignty and worship of God. So, the point of all this is all of heaven acknowledges God's sovereignty. All of heaven, or heaven is a place where God's sovereignty as creator and ruler over the universe is fully acknowledged by all of heaven, worshiping, offering praise, and worship to God.

Verses 8 through 11 then depict in a couple of places exactly what it is that the 24 elders and the four living creatures say and express in their worship. And again, if I can read that starting at verse 8, each of the four living creatures, day and night, never stop saying, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and who is to come. And when the creatures do this, then the 24 elders bow down, and here's what they sing in verse 11, you are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, because you created all things and by your will they were created and they have their being.

In other words, the point is God is worthy of worship because he is the sovereign creator of all he is, all that there is. He is the holy sovereign almighty God who is the creator of all who is and who is sovereign over all creation. And for that reason, God is worthy of worship.

In other words, if I can be pastoral for just a moment when we think in terms of worship and why we worship, sometimes I think that we think that somehow God needs our worship, that God is simply waiting on his creatures to come and worship and he feeds off our worship and somehow he needs our worship. Or that God is up there watching down and waiting to make sure we get our worship right, that we sing the right worship songs, and that we do things in the right way, lest God goes away disappointed because he didn't receive the worship that he wanted. Or, again, that somehow God needs our worship to sort of boost his ego or something like that.

But Revelation chapter 4 reminds us no, the reason we worship God is solely because he is worthy of it and because he is deserving of it. God does not need our worship. God does not need his ego boosted by the worship of his creator.

God does not need our worship to find fulfillment and personal fulfillment. He does not need our worship because he is so lonely that he needs someone to recognize his worth. Instead, we worship God solely because he is worthy of it, because he is the

sovereign creator of all that it is and because he is the holy almighty God that is sovereign over all his creation.

For that reason alone, the church must worship and worship God who is seated on the throne. So, in a sense, Revelation 4 and 5 remind us then of a true reality that transcends our earthly reality. It reminds us of who is really in control.

It reminds us of who is really worthy of our worship in a context and in an environment where that is contested and we are in a world that refuses to acknowledge God's sovereignty. Revelation begins by a vision that is truly real and truly true that transcends our earthly reality. At the same time, Revelation 4 and 5 anticipate a day when all of creation will acknowledge God's sovereignty, when all of creation will worship God as the creator of all that there is, where God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Chapters 4 and 5 then remind us that what takes place in heaven has yet to be but will be accomplished here on earth, despite the fact that earth contested and earth is a place where that is resisted. But in advance of that, Revelation chapters 4 and 5 remind us that we join heaven now in worshiping God. When we, in light of the Lord's prayer, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, although we still await that in Revelation 21 and 22, already when the church gathers to worship in Revelation or in the first century or at any other time, the church joins in heaven in acknowledging God's sovereignty, in already worshiping God and acknowledging that God is the ruler over all the universe in a world that contested and refuses to acknowledge it.

Also, chapters 4 and 5, by providing this vision of worship, chapter 4 and 5 exposes and overthrows all our modern-day idols, anything that would compete with the worship and sovereignty that only God deserves, and reminds us to give the worship and allegiance to anything or anyone or into any group or nation or entity, to give them that the worship and allegiance that only God deserves is nothing less than idolatry. A couple of other interesting things about this text. First of all, just to again debunk kind of a modern-day popular notion, I was raised with this notion that one day, when we get to heaven, we will cast our crowns at Jesus' feet.

And there are even some songs that reflect that idea of casting our crowns at Jesus' feet. The only place you, I think, unless I'm wrong, the only place you find that notion is Revelation 4 verse 10, where they lay their crowns before the throne. Who is it that's laying the crowns before the throne? It's the 24 elders.

Who are the 24 elders? If we're correct that they are angelic beings, then there's no picture in the New Testament of God's people casting their crowns or throwing their crowns at the feet of Jesus or at God's feet. It's the angels here in chapter 4 that do that. Again, that may be true.

I'm not saying that the notion is inaccurate or anything. It's just to realize that if a proper understanding, I think, of chapter 4 of Revelation suggests it's not the saints, it's not God's people who cast their crowns before God's feet. But this is an expression of the 24 elders who are angelic beings, representatives of God's people.

So maybe the implication could be God's people will do the same thing one day. That may be true. But primarily in chapter 4, it is the angelic beings who surround God's throne and worship him who cast their crowns.

And they do that. At least at this point, this is not primarily a reference to take place in the future as well. The other thing is chapter 4 also provides a glimpse of, or we might say an anticipation of what's going to happen in chapter 21 and 22.

It's especially the final hymn that the 24 elders sing in 4, but also the hymn that the living creatures sing. But this last hymn, you are worthy our Lord and God to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things and by your will they were created and have their being. Interestingly, as we said later, the emergence of the rainbow, if it alludes as most commentaries think to Genesis chapter 6 and the rainbow after the flood that represented God's covenant, his commitment to creation, putting that all together, it seems to me that the fact that God is celebrated and worshiped as the creator of all things anticipates or suggests the fact therefore that God is fully able and powerful enough to perform new creative acts, especially the new creation in Revelation 21 and 22.

So, already, and again, this may even be wrapped up with the rainbow as a demonstration of God's faithfulness to his creation. As the sovereign creator of all things who is worthy of worship, God is able to bring about a new creation, which he in fact, will do in Revelation 21 and 22. So, this fact that God is seated on his throne, surrounded by his heavenly entourage, who render him ceaseless praise and worship, who acknowledge his sovereignty as the sovereign ruler over all creation, as the sovereign creator of all.

Now, we are prepared to move on to chapter 5. This sets the tone for chapter 5. As we said, chapter 4 provides the backdrop for or provides the setting for what one finds in chapter 5. So, chapter 5 then is a continuation of the vision in chapter 4. And as we've already mentioned, it's linked by the image of the throne, the same throne that chapter 4 begins with. The one seated on the throne begins in chapter 5 in verse 1, where John says, I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne. That is the same person he's mentioned or the same image mentioned back at the beginning of chapter 4. Now, as I did with chapter 4, I want to read to you chapter 5. And I want you to, again, let kind of the images roll before your eyes to sort of visualize what is going on as John has seen and now recorded.

So, Revelation chapter 5 in verse 1, then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne, a scroll with writing on both sides. And the scroll was sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, who is worthy to break the seals and to open the scroll.

But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside of it. I wept and wept, or I wept greatly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, do not weep.

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. Then I looked and I saw a lamb looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne and circled by the four living creatures and the elders.

He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and he took the scroll from the right hand of the one who sits on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the lamb.

Each one had a heart and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song. You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain.

And with your blood, you purchase people for God, people from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom of priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth. Then I looked and I heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands and 10,000 upon 10,000.

They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders in a loud voice. They sang worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise. 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 praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever.

Then the four living creatures said amen. And the elders, the 24 elders fell down and they worshiped. So, chapter five, as we said, is a continuation of chapter four, but it functions as the climax of chapter four.

This is what chapter four provides the setting for five. This is what chapter four is driving at. And this is where the action takes place in chapter four.

This is the main focus of these two chapters. We've already seen that there's continuity between the two because some of the same images from chapter four,

we're still in the heaven, heavenly throne, but we've already noted the throne and the one seated upon the throne. We've, in reading this chapter, we've seen the four living creatures emerge again.

We've seen the 24 elders emerge again. So, we have the same setting, the throne room of God, but two additional features emerge in this visionary segment in chapter five that are highly significant for understanding what goes on in this chapter. And the two new features or characters are the book or the scroll and the lamb.

These are the two focal points of chapter five: the scroll or book and the lamb that John sees. And the vision revolves around these two things. So, chapter five begins with God who is seated on the throne, the sovereign ruler of the universe, holding a scroll in his hand.

Obviously, any sane reader of this chapter would wonder, well, because we haven't seen this scroll before, wonder what is a scroll? What is contained in it? Why is God holding this scroll in his right hand? The right hand is a symbol of authority and power. Why is the one on the throne holding this scroll in his right hand? What does it contain? Why is it significant? First of all, this image probably, though the image of a scroll could have a background or multiple backgrounds in a number of scrolls and documents that would have been familiar in the Greco-Roman world, such as documents written on either side, known as an epistograph or wills and testaments and things like that. There are a number of things that John's scroll could resemble, but at the heart of it, John's scroll primarily recalls Ezekiel's in chapter two, where starting in verse nine, this is Ezekiel two and nine, which is part of Ezekiel's throne room vision, starting in chapter one that John draws on.

Now in chapter two, verse nine, then I looked and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. Now listen to this, on both sides of it were written words.

So, Ezekiel sees a scroll that has writing on both sides, which resembles exactly what John's is. But there's obviously some differences. John's has seven seals and it's not unrolled before him.

At least in this scene, it's not. Ezekiel associates it primarily with words of lament, warning, and woes, a judgment theme. John doesn't tell us exactly what was in the scroll.

As we said, there's all kinds of evidence of scrolls in the Greco-Roman world. The other Old Testament background in Daniel 12, Daniel sees a sealed scroll, clearly a scroll that is sealed. So, all of this provides then the background for this scroll that John sees in God's right hand that is written on both sides.

Again, one popular notion is, well, what this scroll is, this scroll is to be understood as a testament that is a testament to be sealed until the death of the person. And Jesus Christ's death then now enables him to open the Testament and divulge its content. Others have drawn attention to other types of scrolls or documents in the Greco-Roman world.

And you can look at commentaries, read commentaries to see all the different types of descriptions. Whatever it is, and again, I would reiterate the primary model comes from Ezekiel 2 and probably Daniel 12. But also, John may be drawing on an image that also has resonances with the Greco-Roman world.

But whatever it is, the most important issue is perhaps what it contains. In my opinion, and I would be in agreement with a number of others who suggest something similar, probably this scroll simply contains God's plan for establishing his kingdom on earth. God's plan for bringing both salvation and judgment to the earth.

Remember, we said that part of the issue with chapter 4 is how is the scene in heaven where God's sovereignty is acknowledged, where God rules over all creation, where all of heaven worships, how does that get acknowledged and realized on earth? The scroll is the plan for how that will happen. It contains the plan for establishing God's kingdom on earth. It contains God's plan for bringing about judgment and salvation on this present earth.

Now God sovereignly holds that plan in his hands, symbolized by a scroll. So again, I don't think we should see a literal scroll, especially since later on, the lamb is going to come and take it. And how do you envision a lamb coming up and taking a scroll, at least literally? So again, the scroll functions as a symbol of God's plan to establish his kingdom through judgment and salvation upon the earth.

The next figure that kind of appears, although the angel, although he does not play an important role, at least by himself in the rest of Revelation 5, the next important figure is an angel. And we've already suggested and talked about the fact that angels are part and parcel of apocalyptic literature. You read Jewish apocalypses, and you find angels doing various things and playing various roles in apocalypses in terms of the vision that the seer had.

And you see the same thing happening in Revelation. Later on, we'll see an angel taking John to see certain things. John is often in dialogue with angelic beings.

Twice, he's tempted to bow down and worship an angelic being. But here the angel appears to John in this vision and he plays the role of articulating the main problem of chapter 5 that has to be solved. And so, the angel's voice raises the main problem in the form of a question.

And that question is this, who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll? So, the question, the issue is, here God is seated as the sovereign creator of the universe. The scroll is in his hand, the scroll that contains his plan for establishing his kingdom on earth, for bringing about salvation and judgment. God is sovereignly holding that scroll.

And now the question is, who in the world is able to walk up and simply take the scroll out of the right hand of the almighty God, the sovereign creator of all the universe, and to open it and divulge its contents and to set its contents into motion? That is the main question. And when John says, when the angel says, who is worthy, or when John says, who is worthy to open it and look inside of it, the idea is not just reading it, that someone would unroll it and read it and roll it back up and say, oh, that was interesting, let me tell you what it was about. The idea is, by unsealing it and reading it, someone is able to divulge its contents and to actually set the contents of the scroll in motion, which is God's purposes for establishing his kingdom on earth.

So, it's not just to be read like any other book, but actually the contents to be set in motion. Now, in an attempt to answer this question, John goes on a universe-wide hunt to try to find someone worthy. Again, the question is, who is worthy to open the scroll? That's the main question this chapter answers.

This is the main problem that is raised. Where can we find someone worthy to go up to the one seated on the throne, the sovereign creator of the universe, who holds the scroll in his right hand, a symbol of authority and power, who has the authority to go up and take that scroll and then to open it and enact its contents? So, John goes on a universe-wide hunt to find a suitable person to do so. What I find interesting here is that John becomes a participant in his own vision.

So, he's not just seeing a vision now; he actually becomes a participant in his own vision, and he goes on a journey; although the text doesn't tell us exactly how he did so, the text simply says he goes on a journey throughout all the universe as a for someone who can open the scroll. And the scope of his search is completely exhaustive. He goes to the heavens, all the heavens, including, I take it, this throne room, the heavenly throne room.

He goes to all the heavens, he searches throughout all the earth, and to add to that, he searches under the earth. In other words, this is meant to suggest John leaves no stone unturned. His search for someone worthy is completely exhaustive.

The point too is not so much to figure out physically and geographically where these locations are. The point is, this is universal and this is exhaustive. The entire scope of the universe, including heaven, and I take up the heavenly throne, the heavenly

throne room, is ransacked to find someone who can walk up and take this scroll, open it, and set its contents in motion.

And why I say that too, it's important; this will be important for understanding the rest of the vision. It's important that John does not even find anybody in heaven. Heaven is full of all kinds of exalted angelic beings, but John does not even find anyone in heaven.

Among all these angelic beings, like the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures and whatever other exalted, powerful, angelic being exists in the heavenly realms, including all the other heavenly parts of the universe, John finds no one who is worthy, even in heaven where you might expect to find one. One might not expect on earth, or in heaven, or under the earth, but even in heaven where one might expect to find someone who is powerful enough and worthy enough to open the scroll, John finds no one who can open it. Notice three times John emphasizes that no one was worthy to open the scroll.

He could find no one who is fit and suitable to take the scroll out of the right hand of God, open its seals, and set its contents in motion. And because of that, we're told that John weeps and begins to cry. And the construction here in Greek is rather intense.

So, this is not just John's kind of over in the corner whimpering. It's an outright weeping and crying, a despair because he can't find anyone to open the scroll. In a sense, John is freaking out because he can't find someone to come open the scroll.

And my question, I always read this text, I wondered why is that? Because I kind of pass over this as just kind of a vestige of apocalyptic literature. That's just what happens. John weeps as kind of to add some suspense and interest in the narrative.

But when you think about it, why does John weep? If this scroll contains God's plan to establish his kingdom and to bring about judgment and salvation, if John can't find anyone to open the scroll, and again, he hasn't, he searched the universe over every nook and cranny and found no one worthy. If he cannot find no one worthy, then there is no salvation for God's people. If John cannot find anyone worthy, then there is no vindication for God's people who are suffering.

If God cannot find, if John cannot find anyone worthy, there is no justice on this earth. If John cannot find anyone worthy, the church's suffering is in complete vain and their sacrifice, even those that sacrifice to death, it's in vain. If John does not find anyone worthy, there is no hope for God's people.

There's no justice in the world. There is no salvation for God's people. And so, John weeps, and no wonder he weeps.

One of the 24 elders that we were introduced to back in chapter 4 then interrupts John's weeping with good news. That is, there is someone worthy who has been found. There is someone worthy to open the scroll.

And that is this person that the 24 elders, one of the 24 elders introduces as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Now, what I want to emphasize here, is this will become important, is John only hears about this. The elder tells John in a speech that there's someone.

So, John hasn't seen this person yet. The elder simply says there is someone worthy. It is the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

Using Old Testament imagery from Genesis chapter 49 and verse 9, and Isaiah chapter 11 and verse 1, this imagery of the tribe of Messiah, King from the Lion of Judah, and a Lion as well. This is the one the angel says, this Lion from the tribe of Judah from the root of David. Again, a theme from Isaiah.

This person has triumphed or conquered the same word used back in chapters 2 and 3 of the church's overcoming. Now, this Lion from the tribe of Judah, a clear reference to Jesus as the Messiah, has overcome, conquered, or triumphed, depending on your English translation. And so, he is able, because he has overcome and triumphed, he is able to open the scrolls, the scroll and the seven seals in order to divulge its content.

Now, it's interesting that the author does not tell us specifically at this point how the Lion from the tribe of Judah has overcome. One would expect a display of might and power, perhaps military power, as one who is depicted as a Lion and from the tribe of Judah. And so as one might, perhaps read this and expect, he must have overcome through a display of might and power.

Therefore, he is now able to overcome, or he is now able to take the scroll out of the right hand of God to take away its seals to divulge its content and to set the content in motion. And that is, again, as a reminder, the scroll contains God's plan of establishing his kingdom on earth, bringing about salvation and judgment. What follows is one of the greatest paradoxes in the book of Revelation, if not in the entire New Testament and maybe in the entire Bible.

The elder has introduced John through speech, simply communicating to him and telling him that there is someone, there is a Lion from the tribe of Judah, the root of David, who is able, who has already overcome, perhaps conjuring up ideas of military victory and might. This person has overcome and that's what John hears. Now what happens is what John sees next is anything but a conquering Lion from the tribe of Judah.

Instead, when John turns around, he sees a Lamb standing as slain. He sees a Lamb that looks as if it had been slaughtered. The fact that literally the text says it appears as slaughtered, by that John doesn't mean it looked like he slaughtered, but he really wasn't.

He more likely means that the Lamb looks as if he was slaughtered because he actually was, but now he stands alive before John, but he still looks as if he were slaughtered because he actually was. So, John is not questioning, saying he kind of looks like he was slaughtered or slain, but he really wasn't. But what is intriguing is the paradox or the tension between John and hearing the solution.

The solution is that John hears there's a Lion from the tribe of Judah who has overcome, but when he turns to see the Lion of the tribe of Judah, he doesn't see a Lion; he sees just the opposite. He sees a Lamb and, moreover, a Lamb that has been slain or slaughtered. Probably, the background of this is the Passover Lamb of the Exodus, as well as also the suffering servant from Isaiah chapter 53, the Lamb that was slaughtered.

But the paradox is startling. A Lion that now looks like a Lamb. This will be an important, actually introduces an important principle that we're going to see elsewhere in Revelation and will actually help us, I think, make sense of a couple other places in Revelation that have been disputed as far as how you interpret them, and that is this.

Again, British scholar Richard Baucom has done more than anyone else to sort of highlight this theme and show its significance and that is important for Revelation is to understand that you often find a juxtaposition throughout Revelation of what John hears and what John sees. Several times John will hear something followed immediately by what John sees, and often, what he sees interprets from a different angle what it was he heard. And so here, what John hears is a Lion from the tribe of Judah who conquers but what he sees then is not something, so these are not two different entities or two different persons.

He sees the same thing from different perspectives but what he sees further interprets what it was he heard. He hears there's a Lion from the tribe of Judah who's overcome, but when he turns to see, he doesn't see a Lion of Judah; he sees a Lamb who has been slain. So, the question then is how has the Lamb overcome? How has the Lion from the tribe of Judah overcome? How is this Lamb worthy to take the scroll? It's through his suffering and death.

That is, how has God conquered and won the victory, and how has the Lamb overcome? He overcomes through his suffering and death. He conquers through his sacrificial death, and because of the death and resurrection of the Lamb, because

he's the one who has died and is now alive, he is worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals and to divulge its content, something that no one else could do, therefore setting the events in motion. So, unlike the Roman Empire, it's as if John wants to present an alternative vision of conquering.

The Roman Empire conquered by the sword, they conquered by violence, they overcome by military might, and by extending their empire. Now, by contrast, John presents a vision of conquest that is completely counter to that. That is, Jesus Christ overcomes through his suffering, death, and his sacrifice and it's his resurrection that vindicates him.

So, this makes him worthy to take the scroll. And in fact, this then also becomes a model of how his churches are to overcome. So, again, back to chapters 2 and 3, there was a promise made to those who would overcome.

How were they to overcome? How were they to conquer and be victorious? In the same way the Lamb does through his faithful suffering witness. And through their faithful sacrificing witness, the church will overcome in the same way that the Lamb does. What happens next then? Again, you begin to find a number of verbs of action, indicative verbs that carry the story and the scene along.

In verse 7, we find, I think, what is the climax of chapter 5. This is what everything is leading up to. Finally, the Lamb in 7; came and he took the scroll from the right hand of the one seated on the throne. This is the climax of the scene.

In fact, the verb tense of the verb took is in what is called the perfect tense in Greek, which is one of the tenses an author can use to foreground an activity, to make it stand out from everything else. And that's exactly what John is doing here by using the perfect tense form in Greek of this verb took. John wants this to stick out.

This is the climax. This is the centerpiece of chapter 5. This is what the whole vision has been leading to. This is the solution to the problem raised by the angel.

Who can take the scroll? Here he is. The Lamb who is slain and conquered through his sacrificial death is now worthy to come and take the scroll from the right hand of the one who is seated on the throne. Now, one of the questions that this raises, I think, is who is it that can simply walk up to the one who is seated on the throne and snatch the scroll from his hand? Remember, this is the sovereign God who is seated on the throne, who holds the scroll in his hands, the plan for establishing his kingdom on earth for judgment and salvation.

Who can simply walk right up and simply snatch the scroll from his hand? Who is worthy and fit enough to do that? And notice too that it's interesting that the Lamb, and this is related to something we've mentioned previously, it's intriguing that the

Lamb just sort of emerges from the throne. You don't see, all of a sudden, as you see in some interesting scenes in science fiction movies or something like that, you don't see a crowd parting and some warrior walking up to the throne. You don't see the Lamb coming from outside or simply, you know, oh, I miss that person standing over there.

And then the Lamb comes and enters the throne room. Instead, the Lamb just sort of emerges from the center of the throne. He doesn't come from the outside.

Furthermore, we've already said, remember, John has looked everywhere, including in heaven. So, it's not as if this is somebody John missed. John looked throughout heaven and he didn't find, and oh, here's, it's not presented as if, oh, he missed the Lamb.

Somehow, he failed to see the Lamb. No, he's looked all over the place. He's looked throughout the heavens and he's found no one.

So, that raises the question, who is this person who can simply walk up to the throne and take the scroll out of the right hand of the one seated on the throne? And who is this person who emerges from the throne when John has already looked throughout the heavens, and even the most exalted angelic being is not worthy to take the scroll? Who is this person who emerges from the throne and now takes a scroll from the right hand of the one seated on the throne? The point, I think, is that this is no ordinary figure. This is someone who is greater than anyone else in the universe. Even the highest and exalted and most powerful angelic being, this is none other than God himself.

This is someone on the divide between God and all of creation. This person stands on the God side of the divide. This is someone who shares in the very being of God.

This is someone who is unique and none other than God himself, as I think the rest of Revelation chapter 5 will demonstrate. But now that the crucial event has happened, and the dilemma has been solved, who is worthy to open the scroll? Now that someone has been found worthy, but kind of ironically through his sacrificial death and resurrection, and now that the event of taking the scroll has happened, now that the dilemma has been solved, we are now prepared for the rest of the chapter where heaven is going to respond to this unique event. Next time, we'll look at heaven's response to the Lamb taking the scroll and preparing to open it and enact its contents.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 9, Revelation 4 and 5 continued.