

Revelation 5 and 6: The Lamb and the Introduction to the Seals of the Scroll

Author: Dr. Dave Mathewson | **Session** 10

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Dave Mathewson examines Revelation 5 and 6, presenting Revelation 5 as a heavenly investiture scene where the slain Lamb uniquely receives the authority to take the scroll and execute God's plan for redemption and history in fulfillment of Daniel 7. The vision unfolds through ever-widening concentric circles of divine worship, affirming Christ's deity within a monotheistic framework while celebrating the inauguration of a new creation and a transcultural kingdom of priests through a new Exodus. The narrative then shifts to earth in Revelation 6 as Christ unseals the scroll, unleashing judgment plagues that function as warnings and prelude to the final consummation. Dr. Mathewson evaluates competing interpretations of the seals, trumpets, and bowls, advocating for a progressive view marked by overlapping timing alongside intensifying severity.

Outline

I. Revelation 5: The Investiture of the Lamb and Heavenly Worship

A. The Lamb Takes the Scroll (Rev 5:1–7)

1. The scroll contains God's sovereign plan for establishing His kingdom, judgment, and salvation.
2. Jesus is uniquely worthy to take and open the scroll because He is the slain/slaughtered Lamb who purchased humanity through His sacrificial death.
3. Old Testament roots: Recalls the Passover Lamb and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.
4. Fulfillment of Daniel 7:13–14: The Son of Man approaches the Ancient of Days to receive everlasting dominion, glory, and sovereign power.
5. Characterized as an investiture scene (David Aune) where Christ is invested with divine authority to enact God's kingdom on earth.

B. Features of the Hymnic Celebration in Heaven (Rev 5:8–14)

1. Temple Imagery and Golden Bowls (Rev 5:8)

- a. Golden bowls full of incense recall Tabernacle bowls from Exodus 25 on the table of presence (occurring 12 times in Revelation).
 - b. Incense is explicitly identified as the prayers of the saints for vindication, prompting God's responses in the seals and throughout Revelation.
- 2. Ever-Widening Concentric Circles of Worship
 - a. First Circle (Rev 5:8–10): The four living creatures and 24 elders sing a 'new song' celebrating redemption.
 - b. Second Circle (Rev 5:11–12): Myriads of angels (thousands upon thousands) offer a 7-fold ascription of praise (power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, praise).
 - c. Third Circle (Rev 5:13–14): Every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and in the sea joins in a 4-fold praise to God and the Lamb.
- 3. Reinterpretation of Messianic Power and Victory
 - a. John hears of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, but turns to see a Slain Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes.
 - b. Draws on Jewish apocalyptic imagery (1 Enoch 90 horned lamb), reinterpreting conquest through sacrificial ransom rather than conventional military force.
- 4. Affirmation of Christ's Deity within Monotheism
 - a. The Lamb receives identical divine praise as God on the throne in Rev 4.
 - b. In Rev 5:13, God and the Lamb share the same throne and receive universal worship together.
 - c. Contrasted with angelic beings who strictly refuse worship (Rev 19:10, 22:8–9).
 - d. Lays the biblical foundation for Nicene and Chalcedonian Christology without violating monotheism.
- 5. Redemptive Themes: New Creation, New Exodus, and Transcultural Kingdom
 - a. The 'new song' signals that Christ's sacrificial death has inaugurated the new creation.
 - b. Redemption as a New Exodus (Exodus 19:6): Christ's blood ransoms people to form a kingdom of priests.
 - c. Transcultural Scope: Draws on Daniel 3 and 7 (LXX fourfold formula) to show God's kingdom encompasses every tribe, language, people, and nation (repeated 7 times in Revelation).
 - d. Transfer of Kingdom: Rescues people under the oppressive rule of Satan and Rome into God's reign.
 - e. Reign on Earth: Textual variants ('they reign' vs. 'they will reign') reflect both present inaugurated kingdom reality and future consummated reign (Rev 20, 21–22).

II. Revelation 6: The Opening of the Seals and Earthly Execution of Judgment

- A. Shift from Heavenly Vision to Earthly Reality (Rev 6:1–17)
 - 1. Christ begins unsealing the scroll, executing God's plan for judgment and salvation on earth.

2. Structural Division: Seals 1–6 are opened in Rev 6; Seal 7 is delayed until Rev 8:1 (with Rev 7 acting as an interlude).
3. Sixth Seal (Rev 6:12–17) brings the narrative to the end of history and the Day of the Lord's wrath.

B. The Four Horsemen (Seals 1–4)

1. Grouped visually through horse imagery and logically through interconnected earthly judgments.
2. Function as preliminary warning shots anticipating the final judgment.

C. Relationships Among the Three Judgments (Seals, Trumpets, Bowls)

1. Chronological/Telescoping View: Sequential timeline where each series follows the previous or unfolds from within the 7th item.
2. Recapitulation View (G.K. Beale): Parallel, repeating cycles reviewing the same church history period from different angles.
3. Progressive / Intensification View (Mathewson's Preferred View):
 - a. Overlapping timing across church history, but progressive in temporal proximity to the end and severity.
 - b. Seals affect 1/4 of humanity/earth (broad history judgments); Trumpets affect 1/3 (greater intensity closer to the end); Bowls carry no fractional limits (unrestricted final wrath).
4. Symbolic Meaning of Seven: Represents completeness and perfection of divine judgment rather than a strict chronological sequence.