

Lesson 15

In Chapters 4 and 5, we are being shown the throne of God and of the Lamb. These two chapters are the perfect prelude to the judgments against Rome that are about to follow. If the choice is between Caesar and Christ, then these two chapters are here to demonstrate what John writes elsewhere:

1 John 4:4 — *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*

What follows next has been rightly called “one of the greatest scenes of universal adoration anywhere recorded.”

Revelation 5:9-10

9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; 10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

In these verses, as one commentator stated, “Heaven is revealed to earth as the homeland of music.” We find here the greatest chorus of praise the universe has ever heard. This new song is a song of redemption. It is a song about Jesus and about his church, the ransomed from the earth.

In 4:11, God was worthy of glory, honor, and power because of his **creation**. Here in 5:9-10, Christ is worthy to open the scroll because of his **new creation**, the church.

In 15:3, we will see the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb. The Song of Moses, found in Exodus 15, is another song about deliverance from a great enemy of God’s people and about the goodness of God.

Why do we need a **new** song? Because a greater deliverance requires a new and greater song. Also, this new song depicts a new expression of God's love.

***Psalm 98:1** — O sing unto the Lord **a new song**; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory.*

***Isaiah 42:10** — Sing unto the Lord **a new song**, and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants thereof.*

Who are the redeemed or ransomed in verse 9? Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 2:6 that Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all." And yet not all are ransomed because those outside of Christ remain under a yoke of bondage (Galatians 5:1). **The redeemed in verse 9 are the church.** We belong to Christ — he bought us.

***1 Corinthians 6:20** — For ye are **bought with a price**: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

***1 Corinthians 7:23** — Ye are **bought with a price**; be not ye the servants of men.*

***Mark 10:45** — For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and **to give his life a ransom for many**.*

***1 Peter 1:18-19** — Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not **redeemed** with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; **But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot**.*

Verse 9 tells us that the redeemed come from "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Unlike Judaism, the eternal kingdom of God is a universal kingdom with no national, political, cultural, or racial boundaries. It is open to all who will obey the gospel.

And who are the **kings and priests** in verse 10? Once again, we see the church. We are a kingdom of priests to our God, as had been prophesied.

Exodus 19:6 — *And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.*

1 Peter 2:9 — *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.*

The kingdom and the priesthood were taken from Israel and given to the church.

Matthew 21:43 — *Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it.*

There is a great deal of commentary on the final phrase in verse 10. The KJV has “and we shall reign on the earth,” while the ASV has “and they reign upon earth.” Notice the **two differences**: “we” versus “they” and “shall reign” versus “reign.”

As for “we” versus “they,” some argue that the twenty-four elders are not the church, but are instead singing about the church — and so they refer to the church as “they” rather than as “we.” Two problems with that: **First**, we know that the twenty-four elders are the church — they are an unblemished royal priesthood — who else could they be? **Second**, verse 10 applies to the church whether it is “we” or “they.” If it is “we,” then it refers back to the twenty-four elders, who are the church. If it is “they,” then it refers back to the redeemed in verse 9, who are also the church.

Remember — the church of the first century had an inferiority complex when it came to Rome. God wanted the church to see itself as it really was — to see the church as God sees the church. For that reason, the inspired text shows us the church from many different angles. It is as if God is walking all around the church and telling us what he sees. That is why we have so many different symbols all representing the church.

What about the difference between “shall reign” and “reign”? Neither translation contradicts the fact that we are reigning now.

Romans 5:17 — *For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.*

Revelation 3:11 — *Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*

Ephesians 2:5-6 — Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

If the correct translation is “**shall** reign,” then that just indicates that the church’s reign would be renewed and strengthened by Jesus’ judgment against Rome. For example, in Revelation 20:6 we read that we “**shall** be priests,” yet in Revelation 1:6 we find that we already are priests (“And **hath** made us kings and priests unto God and his Father”). Both, of course, are true.

The promise in these verses is that these Christians would continue to reign with Christ and would continue to be priests. **If they remained faithful unto death, then that relation would not end regardless of what Rome did. Rome did not have a say in their final destiny — that would be determined by the Lamb.**

Revelation 5:11-14

11 And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; 12 Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. 13 And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. 14 And the four beasts said, Amen.

And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

Jesus is worshipped here by angels and by every living creature. The purpose of this scene is to emphasize Christ's worthiness and Christ's power. He is **worthy** to do what must be done, and he is **able** to do what must be done.

The phrase "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" simply denotes an indefinitely great number. Compare:

***Hebrews 12:22** — But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an **innumerable** company of angels.*

We are also reminded of Daniel 7.

Daniel 7:10** — A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: **thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.

Look at verse 12 — what are these innumerable angels doing? **Speaking or singing?** Verse 12 tells us they are speaking. The singing in verse 9 was by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. Now that the angels have joined them, they are speaking instead of singing.

Do angels sing? Most of us would likely answer yes. But interestingly there is not a single **definitive** example anywhere in the Bible of an angel singing. The closest we get is in Job 38:7 — "The morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy." But, **Hark the Herald Angels Say?** It just doesn't have the same ring to it!

If the angels don't sing, then what could the reason be? One commentator said it is because "the angels have never been redeemed. They do not know what it is to sing for the very simple reason that they were never lost sinners and were never redeemed." Perhaps, but, in my opinion (and that's all it is), angels do sing. How could they not sing?

Also, did you know that **God sings?**

***Zephaniah 3:17** — The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee*

*with joy; he will rest in his love, **he will joy over thee with singing.***

Verse 12 tells us that Jesus is worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. (Notice that the list consists of seven items.) These seven attributes are not attributes that Jesus is about to receive having not already had them, but rather these are attributes that Jesus already possesses and that he is worthy to possess. The Greek word translated “receive” in verse 12 is elsewhere translated as “have.”

Elsewhere in the New Testament each of the qualities mentioned in verse 12 is ascribed to Christ:

- **Power and wisdom** — “Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24).
- **Wealth** — “Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor” (2 Corinthians 8:9).
- **Strength** — “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13).
- **Honor and glory** — “For he received from God the Father honour and glory” (2 Peter 1:17).
- **Blessing** — “The blessing of the gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:29).

Jesus already has these attributes. They are further evidence of **why** Jesus is worthy to open the scroll.

We will see the word “wisdom” again in this book, and we will see that we need to share in this wisdom if we are to properly interpret what is in this book.

Revelation 13:18 — **Here is wisdom.** *Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.*

Revelation 17:9 — **And here is the mind which hath wisdom.** *The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.*

How do we get the wisdom needed to understand this book? James tells us in James 1:5 — “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” So do we just ask God and then wait for the arrival of a miraculous dose of wisdom? No. We ask

God in prayer for wisdom, and then we open the Bible that God has given us, and we use the mind that God has given us. God has already given us all the wisdom we need, but sadly for some that wisdom is collecting dust on a shelf somewhere. The more time we spend with God's word, the wiser we will get.

***Colossians 3:16** — Let the **word of Christ** dwell in you richly in all **wisdom**.*

That's how we get the wisdom that this book tells us we need if we want to understand what it is saying.

But what about verse 13? Did literally “**every** creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea” worship the Lamb at this time? No. We know they did not because if they did then this book of judgment would not have been needed. In fact, the reason for this book is that Rome was **not** worshipping and honoring Christ, but instead was setting itself up **against** Christ and his church. So why the word “**every**” in verse 13?

One possibility is that the universal language in verse 13 stresses the **worthiness** of Christ to receive worship from every creature. All of creation owes its existence to Christ. Christ is worthy to receive the adoration of the entire created world — and so verse 13 shows that happening as the beautiful climax of this scene.

Another possibility is that the creation in verse 13 is not the entirety of the physical creation, but is instead the entirety of the **new creation**, the church.

This distinction between the entire creation and the new creation will be valuable to us in our study of Revelation. But in what way is the church a new creation?

First, the church is a new creation by the simple fact that it was created by God in Acts 2, about 50 years prior to when the book of Revelation was written. That makes it literally a **new creation**. It had been prophesied long before, but at the time of this book it had only recently been created.

Second, the church is a new creation because it consists entirely of new creatures.

***2 Corinthians 5:17** — Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a **new creature**: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

Galatians 6:15 — *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.*

Ephesians 4:24 — *And that ye put on the new man, which after God is **created** in righteousness and true holiness.*

Colossians 3:10 — *And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that **created** him.*

And **third**, the church is a new creation because that it how it is described in the Bible.

Daniel 2:44 — *And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven **set up** a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed.*

Ephesians 2:15 — *Having abolished in the flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that he might **create** in himself of the two one new man, so making peace. [ASV]*

Romans 8:22 — *For we know that the whole **creation** groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.*

So whenever we see the creation in this book, let's always stop and ask whether we are seeing the physical created universe or perhaps instead we are seeing the newly created eternal kingdom of God, which is the church.

If the church is in view here, then that would certainly answer our earlier question as to how every creature could be offering praise to God in verse 13.

The entire scene reminds us of Psalm 148.

Psalm 148:1-4 — *Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens.*

The throne of God in verse 13 is also the throne of the Lamb. Note, for example, Revelation 22:1 — “And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of **the throne of God and of the Lamb.**”

Think for a moment about the **remarkable contrasts** in this chapter. As we have said, perhaps the central choice in this entire book is the choice between Caesar and Christ. Each persecuted Christian was called upon to make that choice (often at great physical or economic peril). Would the choice be Christ or would it be Caesar? On what basis should they make that decision?

Chapter 5 contrasts the two choices — not by listing the inferiorities of Caesar, but by listing the superiorities of Christ. Power? Riches? Wisdom? Strength? Honor? Glory? Blessing? They all belong to Christ rather than Caesar. And **worship**? That belongs to the one who liveth for ever and ever — and that is certainly **not** Caesar! **Before you worship someone you need to make sure that the object of your worship will be around to help you when you need help!** It is Jesus who is the same yesterday, today, and forever — not Caesar!

If someone reading this book had started out thinking that the church did not have a chance against the mighty Roman empire — they would certainly be rethinking the odds by the end of this chapter. The church has God and Christ on its side! “If God be for us, who can be against us?” That is the message of Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 6

Revelation 6:1-2

1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. 2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

As Chapter 6 opens and the first seal is removed from the scroll, we see the first part of what is one of the most well known images from the book of Revelation — the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Few scenes from this book have been as influential in art, literature, and the wider culture as this one.

We were told earlier that only Christ was worthy to remove the seals from this scroll, and here we see Christ begin to do just that. Tearing off a seal uncovers and reveals what is to come. The one who opens the scroll will carry out what is written inside, which means that Christ is about to execute the judgments of God found in this scroll.

In the KJV, the living creature says, “Come and see,” as if inviting John to come and see what is about to happen. The best Greek manuscripts simply have “Come!,” which is not an invitation to John but rather a summons for the first of the four horses and its rider to come out onto the stage.

This vision is modeled after the visions found in Zechariah 1:8–17 and Zechariah 6:1–8, which we have already studied in detail in another class. Let’s read the latter of those two references, and, as we do, note the similarities with John’s vision.

Zechariah 6:1-3 — And I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass. In the first chariot were red horses; and in the second chariot black horses; And in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot grisled and bay horses.

The riders in Zechariah’s vision were brought forth from every direction to bring judgment from God upon Babylon and Egypt. These riders perform the same function, but against Rome rather than against Babylon or Egypt.

The living creature in verse 1 speaks “with the noise of thunder.” Once again, thunder reminds us that we are about to see judgments from God.

As we begin Chapter 6, we are faced at once with a difficult and widely debated question: **Who is the rider on the white horse?**

To say that opinions vary on that question is quite an understatement! Many commentaries say that the rider is Christ — but just as many say that the rider is the Antichrist! **I think both of those views are wrong.**

First, let's consider (and reject) the notion that we are seeing "The Antichrist" here. Hundreds of books and even movies have appeared purporting to tell us all about "The Antichrist" in the book of Revelation. And how many times is someone referred to as "The Antichrist" in the book of Revelation? **Precisely zero!** The word "Antichrist" never occurs in this book. John does talk about "Antichrist," but he does so in his **letters** rather than in the book of Revelation:

1 John 2:18 — *Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there **many antichrists**; whereby we know that it is the last time.*

1 John 2:22 — *Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is **antichrist**, that denieth the Father and the Son.*

1 John 4:3 — *And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of **antichrist**, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.*

2 John 7 — *For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an **antichrist**.*

We hear a lot today about the Antichrist — but those verses tell us there are many Antichrists. We also hear today that the Antichrist is yet FUTURE — but those verses tell us there were Antichrists in John's day.

An Antichrist is anyone who "confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh," which means there are **many** Antichrists in the world today, just as John said there were many Antichrists in his own day.

Yes, Domitian was an Antichrist, but he had a lot of company then, and he has a lot of company now. Anyone who denies the divinity of Christ is an Antichrist. Antichrists are not hard to find. Just look at the theology faculty at almost any university! Just look at the Jehovah's Witness knocking on your door.

Also, these riders are sent out **by God against** Satan and his minions, **not** for Satan. As in Zechariah, "these are they whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth." This rider is **not** the Antichrist.

Others say the rider is Jesus himself, and while this view does have some surface appeal, it also has some problems. First, let's look at the evidence in **support** of the view that this first rider is Jesus.

This rider opens the entire affair, which is something we would expect Christ to do. This rider is a conqueror, which is true of Christ. This rider wears a crown, which is also true of Christ. This rider rides a white horse, and in Chapter 19 we will (without any doubt at all) see Jesus riding a white horse.

But this rider is about to unleash a very violent scene. Could that be true of Christ? Yes.

***Matthew 10:34** — Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

This is a book of judgment against the enemies of God. We are about to see the wrath of the Lamb!

As I said, this view definitely has some surface appeal. But even so there are some **problems** with the view that this rider is Christ.

For many commentators, the white horse ridden by Jesus in Chapter 19 is considered “proof” that Jesus is also riding the white horse here in Chapter 6. But one of our interpretive rules is that the same symbol can be applied to different objects. That's true of the “lamb,” for example. Most of the time that symbol applies to Christ, but in 13:11 the “lamb” refers to the beast from the earth. So we can't just automatically assume that every time we see a white horse, Jesus has to be the rider. That kind of surface approach to this book will get us into trouble every time.

Second, there are **four** riders in this part of the vision, and it seems unlikely that Christ would be portrayed this way alongside three other riders. When we see Jesus riding a white horse in Chapter 19, he will not have these three companions. We just saw that only Jesus was worthy to open the scroll — that Jesus is unique — do we really think we would be seeing Jesus pictured with three others in the very next part of the vision?

Third, the crown that Jesus will be wearing in Chapter 19 is a **royal** crown (**diadema**), but the crown that we see here in Chapter 6 is a **victor's** crown (**stephanos**). So while the riders in Chapter 6 and Chapter 19 are both wearing crowns, once we look under the surface we see that they are wearing different kinds of crowns.

Who then is this rider on the white horse in Chapter 6?

Something we haven't mentioned yet is the **bow** that verse 2 tells us this rider has in his hand. In the ancient world, the bow was a sign of military power. So perhaps we should examine this rider on a white horse from a military perspective.

But the mighty Roman army was not afraid of any other military power on earth, right? **Wrong.** The Romans were afraid (terrified, some might say) of one particular foreign military power, and I think this rider represents that military power. All throughout the Old Testament we see God using the threat of foreign invasion against nations he was judging, and I think we see that same kind of language used here. **But what foreign nation could strike such cold fear in the heart of the Romans?** The Parthians.

The Parthians were a warlike federation of tribes located east of the Euphrates, which was the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire. (See the map on the handout available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com, and look at the far right area.) The tension between Rome and Parthia was largely over land, and the most intensely disputed land was Armenia and the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers.

The Parthian army was the only military force in the ancient world feared by the Romans. Why? Because they had defeated a Roman army twice, first in 55 BC and then again in AD 62, not long before this book was written. The Romans were unnerved by that unprecedented defeat, and they feared an invasion from the east. One commentary said that the Romans had an **irrational fear** of the Parthians.



And what do we know about the Parthian soldiers? (Some ancient depictions of them are shown on the handout that is available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com.) The Parthian warriors were famous for being mounted archers, the only such group in the ancient Mediterranean world. They had perfected the ability to shoot arrows accurately from a charging horse. White was the sacred color of the Parthians, and every Parthian army included sacred white horses.

But why is the Parthian in verse 2 given a crown? Two reasons. **First**, the crown shows that Parthia was independent of Rome. Rome liked to think that it controlled everything in the world, but Parthia was a constant reminder that Rome did not control everything and everyone. And **second**, the crown was a more specific reminder of the Parthian's recent victory over Rome. Par-

thia was the victor in that contest, and so this mounted soldier wears a victor's crown.

There is another reason why Rome feared the Parthians, and it involves one of the two primary villains in this book — **the Emperor Nero**. (Nero and Domitian were great persecutors of God's people, and both are described in this book. The difference is that Nero **predates** the writing of the book, while Domitian **postdates** the writing of the book.)

After Nero's death in AD 68, a rumor spread that Nero had not died at all but instead had gone off to the east to raise an army and reclaim his throne. The Parthians themselves fueled this rumor by supporting a succession of pretenders to the Roman throne. The Romans (and not just the Roman Christians) feared that Nero would return to finish what he had started when he had burned down much of the city of Rome.

Continuing with that Nero connection, some commentators see a reference to the Greek god **Apollo** in these verses. Apollo was usually shown carrying a bow, and Nero was depicted as Apollo on some of the coins minted during his reign. I don't think there is a connection with Apollo here, but it is an interesting theory.

One thing is certain: **the Romans feared the Parthians**. And so it is not surprising that we will see the Parthians again several times in this judgment of Rome (9:14 and 16:12). It reminds me of someone with a fear of snakes who is repeatedly made to look at a snake!

The message to Rome in a nutshell is this: Be afraid! Be very afraid! You think the Parthians are scary? They are just the very first thing to come out of this scroll! There is much, much more to come! And it will be much worse than this.

Revelation 6:3-4

3 And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. 4 And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill

one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

The second seal is removed in verse 3, and its removal unleashes a red horse that depicts war — not a specific war with Parthia, but war in general.

As with all wars, this horse was going to cause great suffering. And as with all wars, this suffering would not discriminate between the young and old or guilty and innocent.

We should pause here to note again that God's people were suffering when this book was written, and they would continue to suffer during these judgments. But, and this is the key point, their suffering was **not** a punishment from God. We may see all suffering alike, **but God does not see things the way that we see them!**

This rider would take peace from the world. Rome had created a time of peace, and as we discussed in our introductory lessons, the church had used that peace for its own advantage. Paul, for example, had used the Roman peace to travel all over the Roman empire preaching the gospel. God is telling Rome that the peace will end, and the end of Roman peace would be a hardship to both the godly and the godless.

History tells us that the famous *pax Romana* or Roman peace was no true "peace" at all but was instead a façade built on the Roman sword. And that peace was already beginning to show signs of stress. We have already discussed the conflict with Parthia, but they were not the only problem.

The suicide of emperor Nero in AD 68 was followed by a brief period of civil war, the first Roman civil war since Mark Antony's death in 30 BC. Between June of AD 68 and December of AD 69, Rome witnessed the successive rise and fall of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius until the final accession of Vespasian, the first ruler of the Flavian Dynasty. The military and political anarchy created by this civil war had serious repercussions, such as the outbreak of the Batavian rebellion — an uprising against Roman rule by the Batavi and other tribes in the province and in Gaul. They managed to destroy two legions and inflict humiliating defeats on the Roman army, but were eventually defeated by a massive Roman army. This conflict with Gaul was a taste of things to come for Rome.

In the Old Testament, God often depicted his judgment as a loss of peace.

Zechariah 14:3 — *Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.*

Isaiah 19:2 — *And I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbour; city against city, and kingdom against kingdom.*

The conflict with Jerusalem that Jesus described in Matthew 24 had occurred in AD 70 and was yet another sign that Roman peace was showing signs of stress.