

The vital importance of the scroll

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'Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.'

(Revelation 5:5)

Silent sorrow in heaven?!

An oppressive silence descends upon heaven, whereupon John bursts into tears. The rest of the Book of Revelation shows *no* further tears from John, however much he hears about and sees all that is going to take place. What, then, is upsetting him so *now*? Something that not only grieves him, but actually causes him to burst into tears, a display of poignant sorrow, expressing a feeling of great powerlessness.

Important and rich in content

John sees an immense scroll in God's right hand, the hand with which he acts and intervenes with power. In that hand, he holds the scroll. It has the appearance of an important document, because it has been officially sealed. That means that it is closed: nothing can be added or erased, comparable to a will or testament whose contents are tied up. Speaking of the content, how rich is the content of that scroll! The scroll is overflowing with writing on every available surface. It can contain not one word more. Remarkably enough, it has writing on both sides, whereas, normally, a papyrus scroll only has writing on one side.

It has often been said that this scroll contains all God's plans for the end time. It would then contain all measures to be taken: a scenario of history, God's plan for his world. For does this secret not lie in God's hand?

The Book of Life, overflowing with...

The scroll, or simply the book (*biblion*), demands all the attention and is depicted as large as life: 5:3 '*And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll (biblion) or to look into it*'. At first sight, this scroll appears to be a new star on the horizon. But this is certainly not the case, for *biblos/biblion* is mentioned quite often in Revelation:

- '*The one who conquers ... I will never blot his name out of the book (biblios) of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels*' (3:5);
- In 13:8 (and 17:8): '*And all who dwell on earth will worship it (the beast), everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book (biblion) of life of the Lamb who was slain*';
- In Ch. 20 a special scroll is opened, namely, the Book of Life: '*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. ... I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne and the books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book*

(biblion) of life. If anyone's name was not found written in the book (biblion) of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

- And in Ch. 21, '*only those who are written in the Lamb's book (biblion) of life*' (27) will enter the New Jerusalem.

There is absolutely no reason why Ch. 5 should refer to another book (scroll) than that in all those other places. The document has more the appearance of a will or testament than of the end scenario of history. A Roman testament had to be signed by seven witnesses and sealed with seven seals. Could this not be that 'other book' made by God: overflowing with names? Countless names of people who have been written on the scroll upon which God has 'registered the peoples' (Ps. 87). No space has been left unused. The scroll appears to contain God's plan with all his chosen children from all the nations.

Who is worthy and who is able?

There are *human lives* at stake here. If nothing happens to prevent it, they will all go down in obscurity, every one of them. Then a voice sounds: 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?' Who has the right to do so? Who will answer for them all? While the scroll is waiting, it becomes clear that there is truly nobody who can take this upon himself. No creature from above or below. Nobody in the heavens: not a celestial being, be it an angel or an elder from around the throne. Nobody steps forward. Nobody on earth, from within or outside the congregation...

Why not? Because no person can answer for all these people. No man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life (Ps. 49:8). No man is able to take over *all* from another: debts and shortages, deficiencies and shortcomings. Not least because they themselves are people who are not worthy before God. All come up against their powerlessness and unworthiness before God. Who can appear before God's throne without being destroyed by the fire of his holiness?

Must then the scroll, overflowing with all those names, remain closed? Will the testament never be opened? Nobody volunteers. The silence becomes unbearable. John has been caught completely unawares. He is clearly overcome with grief and bursts into tears. What if the Book of Life is not opened!?? Then creation and the created will never reach their goal! John is shown the perspective of what would happen if God's Son had not taken this role upon himself!

The Lion and the Lamb

One of the 24 elders surrounding the throne, a veteran from the old administration, then speaks. As is fitting for an elder, he opens God's Word and brings to mind the ancient promises. Remember the proclamation of the Lion! He is strong. He will come into action: the Lion of the tribe of Judah...!! '*Judah ...stooped down; he crouched as a lion ...; who dares rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples* (Gen 49:9 - 10). David's offspring, the Root of David. Before David was, was He.

You can just see John's eyes searching ... for a Lion. But no trace of a lion to be seen, wherever he looks. Instead of a lion, he sees a Lamb standing up straight. John witnesses the coming of the Lamb. He sees the Son of God, the King and Servant, he who laid down his life. Through his

sacrificed life, the sealed testament will be opened. It has been authenticated by his death. He has deserved the right to open the Book of Life. *From here on, the Book of Life is called the Book of the Lamb.*

Testament of the ransomed

At excavations in Jericho, archaeologists have found a scroll that had been sealed with seven seals. This scroll came from the fourth century before Christ and contained the text of an *act of ransom* for a slave. It often happened in those times that slaves who had been taken to another country were bought back, or ransomed, free to return to their own country and home.

This is a fitting image for this vision, because it is for this that the Lamb receives praise, that he ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (5:9)! Ransomed or freed from what? Sin is not much different from addiction... so you could say: freed from the devil's grip, who, as prince of this world, holds people hostage. All kinds of addictions has he let loose upon us, the people.

God's Son takes the scroll from the hand of his own Father. It is comparable to a testamentary disposition. The seals can now be broken. He has the right to inspect the names and read them out loud, because he has ransomed them, every one of them. It is the implementation of his Father's testamentary disposition that is taking place here. Exactly along the lines of that poignant prayer by the Son before his death: *the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me*, (John 17:6). Uncountable people, from all peoples and tribes and nations. Bought at great expense, one by one, with the ransom price of his blood. All these people now stand on his Name.

Further on, in another vision, it is all these ransomed people who have been sealed with the seal of the living God (Rev. 7:4). This crowd of ransomed people wear his name and his Father's name on their foreheads (Rev. 14:1-2). The scroll of the Lamb contains Christ's list with all the names of those whom he has taken into his protection.

Delirious with joy

At the supreme moment, when the Lamb, Christ, takes the scroll into his hands, an enormous cheering breaks out. John's fit of crying makes way for delirious joy. Deafening silence is replaced by thunderous noise. John cannot even see where it is all coming from, so enormous is the crowd of worshippers – it has gigantic proportions. All celestial dwellers join in the cheering. Ten thousands of angels exalt the work of God's Son. A new song resounds that is fitting to the new Name that God's Son has been given (3:12). Admiration rings through, each time it is sung.

- *He was slaughtered; he sacrificed himself out of love.*
- *He has bought his people for God at great expense, with the ransom of his life.*
- *He forges them into a unity from all nations.*

This connects seamlessly to Jesus' invitation: rejoice that your names are written in heaven. (Luke 10:20). That certainty cannot be found in your achievements. Not through righteous deeds, but through the blood of the Lamb. Convincing proof: the scroll is no less than *the Book of the Lamb*. Listen to him reading the names from the scroll on which God writes the peoples.