

The Secret Scroll

The First Hymns of Heaven – Part III

Revelation 5:1-7

Introduction

If you bring up the subject of heaven, you will get a dozen different opinions.

Bestselling authors hawk their recent visions of heaven or their near-death experiences which reveal a heaven that we all too easily envision. Most of the stuff that comes out is a description that supports their own views. As a result, there is a man who sees heaven containing a big warehouse with body parts, ready to be sent to the person who asks in faith that needs a new leg or arm or heart.

Evidently, these authors are forgetting that God has actually built into our bodies an aging process that will claim us all eventually, whether Barbara Walters believes it or not, that happens to be the result of sin. For the wages of sin is what? Death (Romans 6:23).

The fall of the human race into sin is part of what causes us to long for full and final redemption.

Our world is aging and it too is heading for a complete and total redemption.

Paul wrote,

[Because of sin, all] creation was subjected to futility . . . (Romans 8:20)

In other words, it would not last forever.

. . . the whole creation has been groaning together . . .

And not only the creation, but we ourselves . . . groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for . . . the redemption of our bodies.

(Romans 8:22-23)

While we care for our bodies and take care of our world as good stewards, ultimately we do not need a new leg or new heart valves. What every believer ultimately longs for is the redemption and glorification of their bodies and the new heavens and new earth as our eternal home. This is where mortality puts on immortality; where,

. . . dishonor . . . is raised in glory . . . weakness . . . is raised in power. (I Corinthians 15:43)

It is natural to be curious about this transition into immortality. The problem is that most visions of heaven sound like a trip to a nice resort or a family reunion.

However, open the scriptures to the visions of Daniel and Ezekiel and John the apostle, and we end up with creatures too strange to describe, and the persons of God the Father and God the Son and God the Spirit, so bright, so colorful, so mysterious, so fearful and terrifying that it bends way beyond our imagination.

People want to know about eternity. People also want to know about eternal God.

If you talk to people today about the person of God, the person of Christ, spirituality you will also hear numerous ideas kicked around.

I read recently about one man who supposedly toured heaven. Following a near-death experience on the operating table, this man claimed he came back to life able to channel the teachings of John the apostle or John the beloved. He believed that he had become the embodiment of a Christ-like power, ultimately teaching that we are the determiners of our fate and we create our own destiny.¹

In other words, God is just a force and you are it. You are God – God is you.

Thirty years ago this New Age thinking was on the outer fringes of the American culture. Today, largely through the promotion of celebrities and talk shows, and positive thinking preachers, it is now mainstream.

Today, phrases have become household terms like, “universal oneness, human potential, holistic health, the divine within, Christ-consciousness”.

The basic theme is that we can speak or think our own destiny; we can create our world – whatever we want. Underlying it all is the belief that we are sovereign.

The newest bestselling author is Rhonda Byrne, who wrote *The Secret*. She writes,

You are God in a physical body. You are Spirit in the flesh. You are Eternal Life expressing itself as you. . . . You are all power.

You are all wisdom. You are all intelligence. You are perfection. You are magnificence. You are the creator, and you are creating the creation of you on this planet.

The earth turns on its orbit for you. . . . The birds sing for you. The sun rises and sets for you. The stars come out for you. . . . Take a look around. None of it can exist, without you. No matter who you thought you were, now you know the truth of who you really are. You are the master of the Universe. You are the heir to the kingdom. You are the perfection of life. And now you know The Secret.ⁱⁱ

This is not a secret. This is a lie as old as the garden of Eden. “Eve,” the serpent said, “wouldn’t you like to be equal with God?” (Genesis 3) This so-called secret has merely repackaged the lie of the serpent!

I knew our friend Erwin Lutzer, the pastor of historic Moody Church, had preached recently on this subject, so I asked him, this past week, for his manuscript. He kindly sent it to me and in it, among other things, he mentioned the Law of Attraction.

This is being taught by guests, as well as promoted, on Oprah Winfrey’s show, which has sort of become a clearing house for spirituality and the New Age. The Law of Attraction, by the way, is repackaged New Age teaching which states that our thoughts and our words send a message out to the universe and the universe responds.

Lutzer summarizes,

[The Law of Attraction teaches that] your whole life has been created by you. You think it and the Universe responds to your thoughts. Your thoughts leverage the Universe through people, circumstances and events to fulfill your wish. Make a command to the Universe. Let the Universe know what you want. The Universe responds to your thoughts. The Universe will rearrange itself to make it happen for you. In other words, you get exactly what you were thinking.

As an aside, Dr. Lutzer, said,

How would you like to tell that to the survivors of the Holocaust? You got exactly what you were thinking – you just attracted your suffering through your negative thoughts.

Erwin’s sermon provoked my interest, so I looked at Oprah’s website for myself. There, prominently displayed, was her section entitled “Spirit and Self”. I read through the statements of guests on her

program. One of her guests said, “It’s almost as though the universe is listening to everything you say and everything you think and saying, ‘Oh, that’s what they want.’ . . . How can the universe bring you anything good [if you’re not thinking good thoughts] if that’s the way you’re talking? That’s why I like to teach people to love themselves, just to love and adore who [they] are.”

As a result of Oprah’s television show and personal influence, thousands of women – perhaps even numbering in the millions – have created their own vision board on which they communicate to their world and to the listening universe what they want out of life.

If you think through this a moment or two, you recognize that a personal, sovereign God has been replaced with the universe. The universe is the giver of gifts and sustainer of your life.

The Bible says,

. . . every perfect gift . . . [comes] down from the Father . . . (James 1:17)

Not the universe.

Furthermore, the Law of Attraction has given the universe divine attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience. This is the way the universe can hear our words and actually read our thoughts (omniscience) and the thoughts of everyone at the same time (omnipresence) and then, have the power to fulfill them (omnipotence).

Ultimately, however, the universe is not a god, but a puppet. The secret allows us to pull the strings and become the sovereign, because our words and our thoughts move the universe on our behalf.

It is no wonder that this religion is popular. It allows us to unashamedly love ourselves and gives us the ability to demand our will be done and then, it promises that the universe is at our disposal so that our will in the universe will be done on earth.

Listen to the perspective of a man who had been given a tour of heaven and who had personally seen the glory of Christ. Now that he knew the secret of life outside earth, did he come back and determine his own destiny and speak his own will? Listen as he writes to the Corinthians,

. . . I sent Timothy to you, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills...

(I Corinthians 4:17 & 19)

“If the Lord wills,” Paul says. In other words, “The will of Jesus Christ determines my way.”

Listen to James rebuke current thought for sounding, by the way, exactly like what this Law of Attraction is encouraging – “Just speak it and it will happen in your life!” James writes,

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit” –

yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring...

Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

“If the Lord wills . . . if it is the Lord’s will we will do this or that.” James concludes,

As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

(James 4:13-16)

The Law of Attraction – the belief that we can create or determine our future by our will and our words – is, according to scripture, arrogant, self-centered boasting. And arrogance and self-centeredness is, James says, evil.

God does not do our bidding – we do His bidding. The Sovereign is not our servant – we are His servants.

The wise way to live is to live with the perspective,

[Lord,] . . . Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)

“Oh no, that’s the wrong way to think,” Rhonda Byrne would write, and Oprah Winfrey, and author Marianne Williamson, and all the others who would add their blessing to the promise, “You are the master of the universe, the heir to the kingdom, the perfection of life. [You speak your future into being...] And now you know *The Secret*.”

Dear flock, be aware, false religion really does not change all that much around the world and in any generation.

Most often, false religion turns God into a mystical force and it turns mankind into God. God is just a force; energy; power. And we are a part of it; in fact, we control it because we have the power

through our thoughts and words to create reality and control the universe.

People intuitively know that there is something out there – there is more to life than meets the eye. We have been created with the reality of eternity stamped upon our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

People not only want to know about it, they want in on some secret about the future and about what is going to happen and how to be on the best side of it. Everyone wants to know the secrets about the future of the universe.

We have it. We have the secret.

There is a secret scroll that reveals the future of the world and the human race. And it delivers the secret to being on the right side of eternity. You have a copy of it in your lap.

Turn to Revelation chapter 5, where we see the secret scroll revealed along with the Person – note that – not a force or mystical consciousness, but a Person – who is able to open the scroll and sovereignly control the future of the planet and the entire universe.

The Secret Scroll – Who Is Worthy to Open It?

Look at Revelation 5:1-4. By the way, this is speaking of God the Father on the amazing throne that we have studied in Revelation chapter 4.

Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne and a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?”

And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it,

and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

In the ancient world, in fact, all the way to the second century A.D., literature was written on a scroll made of parchment or leather. Parchment was the most common, made from papyrus – a reed that grew along the Nile delta. The pith was extracted, laid out in strips, hammered flat, rolled with a stone to make it smooth – and the result would remind us of brown paper. They could make it any length they wanted by simply adding more strips.ⁱⁱⁱ

God the Father is holding a scroll, the text tells us in verse 1, and it had writing on both sides.

There were several documents that the ancient world sealed with seven seals. One of them was a will. A Roman will was sealed by seven witnesses and each of the witnesses affixed their seal to the document. It could not be opened unless all seven witnesses were present. In a way, the scroll in Revelation 5 is the will of Triune God – sealed by the perfect witness of His seven-fold spirit.^{iv}

The future of the universe is not the will of puny people; it is not by the words of mortal flesh – no matter how in love you are with yourself. The future of the universe is by the will and word of almighty God.

The fact that the will of God for the future of the world is written down, as opposed to simply being spoken, is a further implication that His will is settled and unchangeable – it is determined by God alone.^v

I want to mention one more common appearance of a scroll with seven seals. Not only were wills written in this form, but title deeds as well.

In fact, in Jeremiah 32, God told Jeremiah to buy a piece of land in the territory of Benjamin for seventeen shekels of silver. The land was going to be worthless, since Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was actually in the process of defeating Jerusalem. But Jeremiah was told to buy some of the land as a sign that the people would one day return. Two scrolls were produced containing the contract of this purchase. One scroll became public record and it was not sealed. The other scroll was sealed with seven seals and placed in the temple for safe keeping until the owner would later claim rightful ownership and redeem the land to himself.

The analogy is both wonderful and fitting. Jesus Christ is about to receive the title deed of creation, kept safe in the very hand of God the Father. Adam's sin lost earth to the curse, and Satan's dominion, but Christ redeemed creation at the cross, even when it was under siege by the enemy. And one day, Christ will call for the title deed which He purchased with His blood, and He will claim rightful ownership of His land. It is His. It belongs to Him. He is the heir of all things.^{vi}

Only Christ can answer the challenge delivered in verse 2. Notice the verse again,

And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"

Who has this kind of authority?

Who was the witness to the original document? Who paid the price for the land? Who knows the will of God? Who has the power to fulfill the contents of the contract and reclaim rebellious earth?

A search is made throughout creation. Notice verse 3 again – the search begins in the heavens and all the redeemed company, both Old and New Testament saints, and then races through humanity on earth and even through the depths of Hades. And the answer comes back, "No one is capable or worthy."

Imagine this. Abraham was not worthy or Isaac or Jacob. David was not worthy and Daniel was not either. Joseph, Isaiah, the apostle Paul were not worthy, and neither was the apostle Peter. Martin Luther remains silent, as does Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, and Hudson Taylor. None of them stepped forward.

Do you want to believe, as millions today do, that Christ was only one among many prophets who now inhabit heaven?

If you want to believe this, which I do not, make sure you notice that Mohammed is silent, Confucius is silent, as is Buddha, Krishna, Joseph Smith, and all other prophets who have claimed to speak for God.

- No one was capable of knowing the mind and will of eternal God;
- No one was the heir to the planet;
- No one could claim ownership of the universe;
- No one was powerful enough to reclaim creation;
- No one could speak for God the Father whose Spirit blazed like seven torches and whose throne flashed with lightning, shaking the universe with thunder.

No one stepped forward.

Note in verse 2 that God the Father did not ask, "Who is *willing* to open the scroll . . ." but, "Who is *worthy*?"^{vii}

No one moved.

And in verse 4, John the apostle begins to weep.

John MacArthur quoted, in his commentary on this text, the words of W. A. Criswell, the long time pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas.

John's tears represent the tears of all God's people through all the centuries. Those tears of the apostle John are the tears of Adam and Eve, driven out of the garden of Eden; as they bowed over the first grave, as they watered the

dust of the ground with their tears over the silent, still form of their murdered son, Abel. Those are the tears of the children of Israel in bondage as they cried unto God in their affliction and slavery. They are the tears of God's elect through the centuries as they cried unto heaven. They are the sobs and tears that have been wrung from the heart and soul of God's people as they . . . experience the trials and sufferings of life, heartaches and disappointments indescribable. Such is the curse that sin has laid upon God's beautiful creation; and this is the damnation of the hand of him who holds it; that usurper, that intruder, that stranger, that dragon, that serpent, that Satan. And John weeps for the failure to find [One to open the scroll and redeem] this earth now consigned forever to death. It meant that death, sin, damnation and hell should reign forever and ever and God's earth shall remain forever in the hands of Satan.^{viii}

It is no wonder that John dissolves into loud weeping.

John is ushered into the future and there is no one to bring about final redemption. There is no one to administer the will of the Father; there is no one from Adam's ruined race – not a single man or woman of all the billions who have lived on earth – not one fit to reclaim the universe.

No one can conquer evil. No one can usher in the future kingdom. No one can deliver heaven and clothe mortals with immortality. No one.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Law of Attraction might be attractive to the human heart, but it is a short-lived lie.

According to the secrets in this divinely inspired scroll, there is no one who can manage, manipulate, direct, order, suggest, entice, or even wish the universe into doing their will.

No one . . . no one . . . but One – there is One.

The Secret Scroll – The Lamb Is Worthy to Open It

Look at Revelation 5:5.

And one of the elders said to me, "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."

The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David can!

These are Messianic titles – these are clear signs that Israel is coming back to center stage as the tribulation unfolds.^{ix}

Just who is this One who is worthy to open the secrets of the scroll? There are five clues bound up in this text.

1. The One worthy to open the secrets of the scroll is called the Lion.

This speaks of His majesty. He is the majestic and fearful Lion and His roar is terrible and will cause the hearts of mankind to melt with fear the world over.

This is wonderfully portrayed in C. S. Lewis's work, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, in which the beavers are describing their world to the Sons of Adam and the Daughters of Eve – the title given to children of earth. They describe their absent, but fearless leader, the Lion, Aslan, that illustrates Christ.

As the Beavers describe Aslan to the children, Susan says, "Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and make no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver, "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

The One worthy to take the scroll is the Lion – the majestic One.

2. Secondly, the text tells us that this worthy One is from a tribe.

He is a lion – which speaks of His majesty.

However, He is also a member of a tribe – which speaks of His humanity.

He was born on earth – as a man; 100% human – a member of a tribe of people. He will have half-brothers and half-sisters, Matthew 13:55-56 informs us. He belonged to a tribe and a family.

So ordinary was He, in fact, that when He announced who He was, everyone said, "You – God incarnate; the Messiah? No way!"

In fact, on one occasion His half-brothers came to take Him away, thinking He had lost His mind (Mark 3:21).

3. Thirdly, the text tells us that He is specifically from the tribe of Judah.

This speaks of His nationality. The term “Jew” is phonetically derived from “Judah”. It was the tribe of Judah from which the Messiah was prophesied to come (Genesis 49:10).

4. Fourthly, the text also tells us that the worthy One is called the Root of David.

This speaks of His royalty. He is the descendant of David and the genealogies of the Messiah must prove He descended from David in order for Him to rightfully claim the throne of David in Jerusalem. This is the reason Matthew, writing primarily to a Jewish audience, began with the genealogy of Christ – proving that Jesus had indeed descended from the family tree of David.

The title “Son of David” was a well known Messianic title used frequently in the Gospels of Jesus Christ.

John hears these descriptions that reveal the worthy One’s:

- Majesty;
- Humanity;
- Nationality;
- Royalty.

5. Finally, the Root of David also refers to His deity.

We can understand the idea of “Root of David” communicating two truths: He is both the offspring of David and the predecessor of David.

- He who came after David was the Son of David.
- He who existed before David was the Root of David.

Think of it this way: as far as His humanity is concerned, He had His roots in David; but as far as His deity is concerned, He was the root of David.^x

Both are emphasized at the end of Revelation when Christ says of Himself,

. . . I am the root and the descendant of David... (Revelation 22:16b)

The only person who could be both fully human and fully God, born on planet earth as a Jew, to a tribe and to the family of David, while at the same time being the pre-existent predecessor of David is the One who claimed before His nation Israel,

. . . before Abraham was [born], I am. (John 8:58)

This worthy One, who is about to dry the apostle John’s tears, is none other than Jesus Christ.

John then makes four observations about the sovereign Lord. Notice Revelation 5:6-7.

And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

1. John’s first observation, in verse 6, is that the Lamb is standing.

He has risen to take the scroll and begin directing the machinery of wrath that will envelop the earth.

2. John’s second observation is that the Lamb has suffered.

John writes, in Revelation 5:6, “He looked,”

. . . as though [He] had been slain . . .

This is a reference to the fact that Christ still bore the scars of His crucifixion – perhaps even more than the scars left in His hands and feet and the wound left by the spear in His side.

When the resurrected Christ appeared to His disciples He graciously condescended to the doubts of Thomas by inviting Thomas to touch His hands and side. Upon sight of these, Thomas fell at Christ’s feet and said,

. . . “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)

Now, standing as the ascended Lord – at the right hand of the Father, signifying equal authority with the Father – Christ is seen as the Lamb who was slain.

A Sunday school teacher once asked her children what she thought would be a trick question – only she was the one left speechless. She asked her class, “Children, is there anything manmade in heaven?” To her surprise, one of the young boys spoke up and said, “Yes, Ma’am, there is.” She laughed and said, “Now, what could possibly be in heaven that is manmade?” To which the young child said, “The nail prints in Jesus’ hands.”^{xi}

This Lamb has suffered by those whom He saves.

3. John’s third observation is that the Lamb that suffered and stands is also supreme.

John sees Him,

. . . with seven horns . . .

This is the symbol of perfect and complete power – seven meaning He is supremely powerful.

Between the Old Testament and New Testament, during the 400 years when the Maccabees revolted and the great heroes of Israel fought for liberation, their banner was a lamb with horns.^{xii}

This Lamb will ultimately liberate His people. He has suffered; He is standing; He is supreme.

4. John's fourth observation, furthermore, is that the Lamb has sovereign omniscience.

John sees that He has,
... *seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God* ...

He sees everything by His Spirit!

We cannot pull the wool over this Lamb's eyes. He does not miss a thing.

Now notice the climax of this scene in Revelation 5:7.

And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

“He took the scroll.” The verb “took” is intensive perfect, emphasizing the permanence of His grasp. This is His scroll and it is His abiding possession.^{xiii}

Roman reliefs show emperors holding such scrolls as a symbol of their power and authority. In handing the scroll to the Lamb, God the Father shows that He has transferred all authority and power to God the Son as the wrath of the Lamb is about to be unleashed upon the earth and the future of the universe unveiled.^{xiv}

Stop weeping John – and start singing.

No wonder the redeemed and the host of heaven sing one of the great hymns of heaven, which we will look at more carefully in our next session.

*Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood
you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people
and nation,*

Worthy is the Lamb.

Conclusion

John dries his tears. This Lamb is our Leader. This Sovereign is our Savior!

This Lamb is not a mystical spirit, but a person who bears scars forever as symbols of His love and grace.

God is not you or me. He is not a force we dissolve into. God is a distinct person who delivers us and whom we will one day worship.

I recently rode behind a vehicle driven by a woman who had, on the back of her car, a sticker that read, “Goddess at Work”. Twenty years ago that would have been an attempt at humor. Today, that woman is probably dead serious.

Erwin Lutzer's manuscript referenced a woman in his church who had become a Christian. She was a professor at a nearby university. She had studied religions of all kinds, along with the current New Age beliefs. But she gave her heart and life to Christ. In her testimony, she said that she came to recognize, by God's grace, that all the other religions in the world told her that she was a god, while Christianity told her she was a sinner. However, she knew deep down that she was not a god. And Christianity offered her the truth of who she was and forgiveness for the sins she knew she had committed.

Ladies and gentlemen, the bestselling book, *The Secret*, will ultimately lead to despair because we cannot satisfy ourselves.

Even more, all who follow this will one day come to terms with their own insufficiency, whether on their deathbed or sickbed, or even more tragically, when standing one day before this holy God they had replaced with themselves. But the tragedy is multiplied, even now, through life, for:

- if we are gods, there is no one who can guide us;
- if we are sovereign, there is no one to save us;
- if we are simply part of a force, we have no one who can forgive us.

This is the true secret of the scroll – the Lamb is sovereign. The Lion of Judah is the pre-existent Creator of the past and sovereign Lord of the future and He is willing to become your Savior.

ⁱ David Jeremiah, *Escape the Coming Night* (W Publishing, 1990), p. 85.

ⁱⁱ *Servant Issue*, Number 79, (2007), p. 7.

ⁱⁱⁱ William Barclay, *Revelation: Volume 1* (Westminster Press, 1976), p. 165.

^{iv} Robert Thomas, *Revelation: Volume 1* (Moody Press, 1992), p. 377.

^v Steven Lawson, *Heaven Help Us!* (NavPress, 1995), p. 70.

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- ^{vi} Sam Gordon, Worthy Is the Lamb (Ambassador, 2000), p. 129.
- ^{vii} John Phillips, Exploring Revelation (Loizeaux Brothers, 1991), p. 88.
- ^{viii} John MacArthur, Revelation: Volume 1 (Moody Press, 1999), p. 165.
- ^{ix} Ray Stedman, God's Final Word (Discovery House, 1991), p. 131.
- ^x Gordon, p. 135.
- ^{xi} Lawson, p. 77.
- ^{xii} Barclay, p. 171.
- ^{xiii} Thomas, p. 394.
- ^{xiv} Kendell H. Easley, Holman New Testament Commentary: Revelation (Holman, 1998), p. 90.