

Genre Worksheet 4: Revelation 5:1-10

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BC 532 Advanced Hermeneutics

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1. What is the historical background of this text?

a. **Who wrote it, and what are his qualifications?** “The book of Revelation is a letter from John the apostle—one of Jesus’ inner circle among the twelve disciples.”¹

b. **Who was it written to?** This prophetic- apocalyptic letter was written to transcribed “to the seven churches named in chapters 2 and 3.”²

c. **When was it written? (historical circumstances, approximate year, if known)**
 “Revelation was written in the last decade of the first century (ca. AD 94-96), near the end of Emperor Domitian’s reign (AD 81-96). Although some date it during Nero’s reign (AD 54-68), their arguments are unconvincing and conflict with the view of the early church. Writing in the second century, Irenaeus declared that Revelation had been written toward the end of Domitian’s reign. Later writers, such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Victorinus (who wrote one of the earliest commentaries on Revelation), Eusebius, and Jerome affirm the Domitian date. The spiritual decline of the 7 churches (chaps. 2-3) also argues for the later date. Those churches were strong and spiritually healthy in the mid-60’s, when Paul last ministered in Asia Minor. The brief time between Paul’s ministry there and the end of Nero’s reign was too short for such a decline to have occurred. The longer time gap also explains the rise of the heretical sect known as the Nicolaitans (2:6,15), who are not mentioned in Paul’s letters, not even to one or more of these same churches (Ephesians). Finally, dating Revelation during Nero’s reign does not allow time for John’s ministry in Asia Minor to reach the point at which the authorities would have felt the need to exile him.” ³

¹ Douglas Mangum, ed., [Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament](#), Lexham Context Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), Re 1:1–22:21.

² Douglas Mangum, ed., [Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament](#), Lexham Context Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), Re 1:1–22:21.

³ The MacArthur Study Bible, Legacy Standard Edition, (Harper Collins Christian Publishing, 2024).

d. Why was it written? “Christ is the protagonist of the book, who relentlessly pursues God’s victory over the earth through judgment and conquest. Revelation can be organized into three divisions: Christ’s proclamation to the seven churches (1:1–3:22), God’s wrath poured out on the wicked (4:1–11:19), and Christ’s establishment of his rule (12:1–22:21). Within the canon of Scripture, Revelation functions as the consummation of all things; it describes the time predicted in Psalm 2 and 110 in which God will put all enemies under Christ’s feet and set his Anointed on his holy hill of Zion. Revelation does not exist merely to satisfy the eschatological (end times) curiosity of the idle: it teaches that, in view of the coming of Christ to earth, readers are to repent of their sins and persevere in their allegiance to Christ.”⁴

2. What is the literary context of the text?

a. What is the genre and/or subgenre? “The purpose of Revelation is tied up with its literary type as a prophetic-apocalyptic letter, especially with its images. The images of Revelation create a symbolic world in which the readers may live as they read (or hear) the book.”⁵

b. How does the genre affect the meaning of the text? “By using images in this way, Revelation answers the question “Who is Lord?” During times of oppression and persecution, the righteous suffer, and the wicked seem to prosper. This raises the question of whether God is on the throne and still in control. Revelation says that despite how things appear, Caesar is not Lord and Satan is not Lord. Revelation provides that prophetic word from God that people need to remain faithful amid opposition.”

“God uses this prophetic-apocalyptic letter to pull back the curtain in his cosmic drama and show his people how things will turn out in the end. The main message of Revelation is “God will

⁴ Douglas Mangum, ed., [*Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament*](#), Lexham Context Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), Re 1:1–22:21.

⁵ Zondervan Academic, *Grasping God’s Word*, J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays (2020), p. 333.

win!” Those who were not compromising with the pagan world should see God’s future and be filled with hope in the present. Those who are compromising should be shocked out of their spiritual slumber and warned to repent. As the “last chapter” of the story of salvation, Revelation gives people a foretaste of God’s ultimate victory and offers them the perspective and the encouragement they need to overcome.”⁶

3. Write out the argument of the text in your own words?

a. What is the major theme of the text? The theme of the text is a response to a question which is asked in the first five verses. “Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” ³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, ⁴ and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it,” (Rev 1:1-4). We receive our answer in verse 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,” (Rev 5:5). Dr. MacArthur further explains Christ’s supreme authority and dominion over the earth. We begin with the significance of the scroll. “This is typical of various kinds of contracts in the ancient world, including deeds, marriage contracts, rental and lease agreements, and wills. The inside of the scroll contained all the details of the contract, and the outside- or back- contained a summary of the document. In this case it is almost certainly a deed- a tile deed to the earth.” ⁷ We read about the worthy One, Christ. “One of the earliest titles for the Messiah, it speaks of His fierceness and strength, which although glimpsed in His first coming, do not appear in their fullness until the moment

⁶ Zondervan Academic, Grasping God’s Word, J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays (2020), p. 333.

⁷ The MacArthur Study Bible, Legacy Standard Edition, (Harper Collins Christian Publishing, 2024).

anticipated here. Another will clearly messianic title, it anticipates His being a descendant of David, who with devastating will clearly messianic title, anticipates His being a descendant of David, who with devastating force compel the wicked of the earth to succumb to His authority.”⁸

b. What are the repeated words in the text? In the ten verses, the word “scroll” is repeated seven times, while “God” and “worthy” are mentioned three times. Following with two listings each are “seven seals”, “earth”, “Lamb”, “seals”, “seven seals”, and “Throne.”

c. What was the intended meaning to the original readers? Due to the harshness of persecution that the churches were facing during John’s authorship of the letter, one can view the writing of this angelic vision as a warning and an encouragement. Twenty-first century Christian Americans cannot quite relate to the level of persecution experienced by the early church. While we grieve losing our Christian culture and the value of general civility amongst neighbors, we still have laws to protect us, and we can provide for our families. (We do not have to join pagan guilds and swear allegiance to a foreign god to work.) As Americans, we know very little of suffering compared to our dear brothers and sisters in other parts of the world. These verses give hope to a storm tossed and persecuted church under a morally deranged and psychotically depraved Emperor. Christ is worthy to open the scroll, and He reigns.

Dr. MacArthur gives a beautiful explanation of our worthy Lamb. “Hearing of a lion, John turns to the Lamb. God required the Jews to bring the Passover lamb into their houses for 4 days, essentially making it a pet, before it was to be violently slain. This is the true Passover Lamb, God’s Son. The scars from the slaughter are still visibly clear, but it is standing- it is alive. In scripture, horns always symbolize power, because in the animal kingdom they are used to exert power and inflict wounds in combat. Seven horns signify complete or perfect power. Unlike other defenseless lambs, this One has complete, sovereign power.”⁹

⁸ The MacArthur Study Bible, Legacy Standard Edition, (Harper Collins Christian Publishing, 2024).

⁹ The MacArthur Study Bible, Legacy Standard Edition, (Harper Collins Christian Publishing, 2024).

5.

Verses 4-9 instill a deeper and profound hope that God sees our efforts and records our prayers.

“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. ⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints,” (Rev 5:4-9). Dr. MacArthur explains. “These golden, wide-mouth saucers were common in the tabernacle and temple. Incense was a normal part of the OT ritual. Priests stood twice daily before the inner veil of the temple and burned incense so that the smoke would carry into the Holy of Holies and be swept into the nostrils of God. That symbolized the people’s prayers rising to Him. Specifically, these prayers represent all that the redeemed have ever prayed concerning ultimate and final redemption.” ¹⁰

To be heard by God is an extraordinary privilege. The fact that our prayers are an incense and even recorded, is unfathomable considering the vastness of our universe. While God is not beholden to our requests, (our vantage point is finite), He cares enough to receive our prayers as an act of worship and devotion to His Holy throne. To be heard by God in a chaotic, fast paced, fallen world, is a treasure and a comfort to a struggling Christian who may be facing life’s challenges alone or with minimal support. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling,” (Psalm 46:1-3).

God’s promises and comfort to His children continue as described when the scroll is open.

¹⁰ The MacArthur Study Bible, Legacy Standard Edition, (Harper Collins Christian Publishing, 2024).

“And they sang a new song, saying, “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, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,^{and} they shall reign on the earth,” (Rev 5:9-10) If a Christian ever doubts that he or she is loved, these verses will provide comfort and clarity. Christ, who owns the title deed to the earth, ransomed and purchased His children with His spotless blood, and has established us to be a kingdom and priests unto God. Does God need to do anything else to communicate the depths and transformative power of His sovereignty and perfect love? There is abiding hope for us, in the midst of life’s circumstances and difficulties. Christ’s sacrificial love for us, and the power He possesses to protect and care for us, are profoundly good news to those who are suffering and may feel alone.

d. How wide is the gap between this text and the contemporary audience?

The gap between the original and contemporary audience is both wide and small. The wide width are the differences of the level of comfort and prosperity that differ from the first century Christians to a contemporary audience. However, that may change with time and as we experience greater degrees of God’s judgement upon our world. Where the gap is narrow is that all people suffer and experience varying levels of difficulties in life. Man’s greatest need is to be forgiven by God of his sins. His original nature is corrupt and ruined and he is at enmity with a Holy God. One could possess all the treasures, accolades, and riches in this life. However, if he or she is without God, this person gropes in the dark and is cut off from all hope and life. They are probably miserable, despite what earthly comforts that they may enjoy. Man is radically depraved and needs a Savior. God, in His mercy and grace, has given us His one and only Son.

This is good news to all men. The sovereign King of this Universe, who owns the title deed to the earth and rules the hearts of kings and those in authority, is also the slain Lamb who conquered death and purchased His people with His blood. Not only has He ransomed us, but He has also ordained us to be priests unto Him in His Kingdom. Does man need anything else?

4. Summarize all the theological principles in this text?

a. What are the universal truths that would be applicable to both the original and present day readers? Christ reigns. The title deed of the earth, along with a people of His own possession, are purchased by His blood. Jesus has loved His children to the outer limits, and despite what our fallen flesh and the world may broadcast, nothing can satisfy our souls but Him. We should follow His example in all areas of our lives. He is the only One that we should fear.

b. What does this say about what a person should believe? Christ can be trusted and we should be a people of prayer. Following the example of the early Church who orchestrated their lives around prayer, our prayers are a “golden bowl of incense,” (Rev 5:8) to God. We should believe and adhere to God’s sovereignty and His authority. As the City of Los Angeles is ravaged by anti- ICE riots, I am perplexed and saddened by what I see happening on the national stage. It is a tragedy on multiple fronts. For honest, law-abiding citizens and business owners immersed in the violence, but also for some of our leaders who seem to be shaking their fists at God. I believe that the Romans One mindset of the reprobate mind turned over and no longer functioning is on full display in 2025. It is the departure of reality itself.

People, and even elected officials, protect the criminal and blame the victim, and even reject that any rules or accountability should have any place in our society. It seems to be the promotion of anarchy and general lawlessness. God is a God of order. The laws which He has written on our hearts, and the reverential fear that we are commanded to show Him, are to protect our lives and others. I am praying that God will have mercy on us, and that sanity will return to the public square.

5. What are the clear points of application in this text?

a. How do the theological principles in this text intersect with life today? One of many reasons an unregenerate heart cannot and does not want to repent and turn to God, is the overwhelming belief that he is autonomous over his own life and answers no one. It is his pride, he wants to be God. This is why Satan and a third of the angels fell from heaven. We see this same struggle today. “Therefore, God also highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, and of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,” (Phil 2:9-11).

One of man’s many problems is that he takes God’s silence as approval of his wicked behavior. God’s judgment tarries. Our psychologized, victim-hood society mindset alleviates any responsibility that we may play in our suffering. If the Church, and the lost, truly understood the level of accountability that we will all face, our world would be a very different place. “But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgement. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned,”

(Matt 12:36-37). Christ reigns, and we do not. God used many horrific and painful circumstances to bring me to the end of myself at age 20 and fully surrender to God. I am grateful for His wise affliction which brought me to Him and causes me to cling to Jesus.

b. In what ways do you see this text speaking to the progressive sanctification of the believer today? The following verses provide comfort. “Then I was crying greatly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, ‘Stop crying! Behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the scroll and its seven seals,” (Rev 5: 4-5). Dr. MacArthur explains. “Another clearly messianic title, it anticipates His being a descendant of David, who with devastating force will compel the wicked of the earth to succumb to His authority.”¹¹

Our trials and suffering will not always last. They are a momentary affliction in light of eternity. This is good news to storm-tossed people. Christ is ruling and reigning, and we will all answer to Him.

6. What type of relevance do you see in this text for counseling?

a. What does this text say about what a Christian should think and believe?

We take comfort that the Lord is worthy to open the scroll. The title deed of the earth belongs to Him, and He is in control. He has purchased His own people with His atoning blood. We can take heart that the lord is in control, and He is sovereign over our lives, kings in

¹¹ The MacArthur Study Bible, Legacy Standard Edition, (Harper Collins Christian Publishing, 2024).

authority, and all of creation.

b. What does this text say about the Christian and his/her heart motivations?

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,” (Matt 5:18). The 10 verses in Revelation exhort us live in such a way that honors a reigning Christ and to guard our hearts against competing loyalties. He is the only One worthy to open the scroll.

c. What does this text say about the Christian and his/her behavior? When we

Christians stand at the Judgement Seat of Christ; all our works will be evaluated.

Not only what we have done, but the motivation behind our actions. God knows our thoughts, He knows what we will say before we utter a word. This should terrify and comfort us. We can trust Him and not fret. He is ruling over this Universe. However, we should live lives which reflect His Glory, character, and give Him honor. Nothing is hidden from His sight and we are entirely responsible for our actions and ourselves.

d. What does this text say about repentance and the gospel? This text confirms

that Christ is King, not us. Our lives, prayers, and conduct matter to God and we will all answer to Him. In God’s kindness and unfathomable mercy, He has provided His Son, to be the Savior of the world. We associate and romanticize the meek, suffering servant who walked upon this earth for 33 years. However, the description of the Risen Christ in Revelation chapter 1 reveals that He is the King who will subdue all men unto Him and punish the wicked. Everything, including the breath in our lungs belongs to Christ. We are merely stewards and managers of responsibilities and gifts entrusted to us. I appreciate the overall message of Revelation to battle weary servants of God. Sinners, and even the Church must repent. Christ is King and God wins. We are to remain faithful and persevere to the end despite the difficulties and hardships of living behind enemy lines on planet earth.

